

Mill Creek MetroParks

White-tailed Deer Management Plan



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Mission Statement

The mission of Mill Creek MetroParks is to provide park, recreational, educational, and open space facilities of regional significance. In fulfilling this mission our objectives are:

To be responsive to community needs

Studies and surveys direct the MetroParks to preserve appropriate natural and cultural areas, make improvements to MetroPark facilities, develop additional recreational opportunities, and continue to strengthen activity and public information programming.

To be environmentally sound

Stewardship strategies will be dictated by the intrinsic nature of the land.

To be adaptable

The only certainty in our world is that change is occurring at an increasing rate. To respond, the MetroParks must maintain strong public information and involvement programs and form new kinds of creative liaisons to meet changing needs.

To be economically feasible

The MetroParks has finite resources that are not guaranteed in perpetuity. It must constantly work to broaden its base, especially through new partnerships. Revenue generating programs and facilities must be a key element in the overall funding picture.



Mill Creek MetroParks White-tailed Deer Management Plan: Goals and Objectives:

The purpose of this management plan is to summarize current conditions concerning white-tailed deer in the MetroParks and provide meaningful science-based recommendations to improve the overall health and vitality of our deer herd, while also mitigating the negative ecological impacts associated with long-term overbrowsing and reducing human-conflict associated with an overabundance of white-tailed deer. This management plan is a fluid-document and will be routinely updated as additional information becomes available or as management objectives change over time.

The following objectives will serve as the guiding principles for white-tailed deer management in Mill Creek MetroParks:

- Maintain healthy white-tailed deer populations in a sustainable fashion within the ecological carrying capacity of the land, allowing for the natural regeneration of native flora.
- Restore and maintain ecological balance through best management practices related to wildlife and habitat management to promote biodiversity to the highest degree ecologically possible for all species of native flora/fauna, highlighting those of increased concern (rare, threatened, or endangered).
- Restore and maintain the ecological integrity of MetroParks properties to ensure high-quality natural areas are available to current and future generations of park visitors.

In accordance with the Mission Statement, Mill Creek MetroParks strives to protect properties throughout Mahoning County, acquiring and preserving those that exhibit excellent natural features and ecological function.

The MetroParks actively manages natural resources using a facility-based approach incorporating environmentally sound best management practices to achieve these goals.

White-tailed Deer in the MetroParks

The white-tailed deer (*Odocoileus virginianus*) is a common sight throughout Ohio and much of the United States. White-tailed deer have proven to be extremely adaptable, as their populations have risen exponentially since the late 20th century despite increased habitat fragmentation caused by human development. Northeast Ohio is no exception, with the overabundance of white-tailed deer becoming a prominent threat to native ecosystems throughout the region over the last several decades. While these effects can be felt across all landscapes, they are often disproportionally concentrated in urban/suburban areas including parks and municipalities.

Negative ecological impacts associated with the overabundance of white-tailed deer within Mill Creek MetroParks can be traced back to the mid-1990s, however the subject was revisited with renewed focus beginning in 2020.

Initial concerns were raised by MetroParks staff who reported visual evidence of high numbers of deer being seen throughout the MetroParks and surrounding areas. These concerns included overall herd health within the MetroParks and a host of ecological concerns that were widespread throughout various facilities. In response to these concerns the MetroParks put into motion a multi-year campaign to:

- Review historical information.
- Gather current population data.
- Assess ecological conditions.
- Provide management recommendations concerning white-tailed deer populations on MetroParks properties based upon methods permitted by the Ohio Department of Natural Resources: Division of Wildlife.

Historical Data

To better understand current conditions and make meaningful recommendations, MetroParks staff first looked to the past to learn about historical information concerning white-tailed deer populations within the MetroParks.

Beginning in 1997, the MetroParks commissioned numerous aerial deer surveys which continued on a regular basis until 2002. Survey efforts focused on Hitchcock/Huntington Woods and Mill Creek Park (south of Shields Road) and included both daytime visual surveys flown by helicopter and nighttime infrared surveys flown by fixed wing aircraft. During this time, population estimates were identified as high as 98.4 deer/mi². (Appendix A)

Survey Results:

- Facilities: Mill Creek Park (South of Shields Rd.), Huntington Woods, and Hitchcock Woods Surveyed Area: (~1660 Acres or 2.59 Sq Mi)
- Date: February 7, 2000
- Survey Method: Fixed Wing Aircraft (Infrared)
- # of Deer Detected: 255 Deer Detected = 98.4 Deer/mi²

No Aerial Survey Data Available from 2002-2022

The result of the aeriels surveys confirmed the anecdotal evidence of frequent deer sightings and severe overbrowsing witnessed by Park District Staff and other natural resources professionals (Ohio Department of Natural Resources, Cleveland Museum of Natural History, etc.). These results revealed population levels that were estimated to be 5x recommended levels in the year 2000.

Current Data

Given the nearly 20-year gap in management activities and any previous data pre-dating the acquisition of many regional facilities, the MetroParks quickly recognized the need for current population estimates. To accomplish this task, multiple survey methods were trialed beginning in January of 2021:

Helicopter Survey

A visual helicopter survey was planned in partnership with USDA Wildlife Services in January of 2021, however this effort failed due to the lack of suitable weather conditions (snow cover required).

Roadway Infrared Survey

In place of the proposed helicopter survey, a roadway infrared survey of Mill Creek Park was substituted in March of 2021 and repeated in March of 2022. After multiple attempts, it was the consensus of both Mill Creek MetroParks and USDA Wildlife Services that this method was not determined to be a viable option moving forward based upon reduced visibility from roadways due to topography, the lack of road access to some portions of the Park, and the inability to utilize this method outside of Mill Creek Park due to accessibility issues. (Appendix A)

Aerial Infrared Survey

Given the lack of success provided by previous survey methods, the MetroParks felt the most accurate and comprehensive method to gain useful data for all MetroParks properties would be an infrared aerial survey flown by fixed-wing aircraft. The MetroParks commissioned an infrared aerial survey to be conducted in January of 2022 by “Above All Aerial & Specialty Photography” based in Medina, Ohio. The Contractor surveyed all MetroParks facilities (excluding the MetroParks Bikeway) including an ~400’ buffer beyond our property boundaries.

The survey was flown over two (2) nights, with the “Central Area” being flown on January 21, 2022. The “Central Area” included Mill Creek Park, Huntington Woods, Hitchcock Woods, Collier Preserve, and the Mill Creek Wildlife Sanctuary. The remaining regional facilities were surveyed on January 26, 2022. These facilities included Sebring Woods, Egypt Swamp Preserve, Hawkins Marsh, Vickers Nature Preserve, Sawmill Creek Preserve, the MetroParks Farm, Cranberry Run Headwaters, McGuffey Wildlife Preserve, Springfield Forest, and Yellow Creek Park.

Weather conditions were excellent during both nights of the survey with approximately 6 inches of snow cover, low wind speeds, and air temperatures of sub-10 degrees Fahrenheit. The survey was flown at a constant altitude with the distance from the ground varying between 1000’ and 1200’, the lowest legal altitude. These survey conditions allowed for the greatest resolution possible.

Over the course of several months, the data was reviewed in video format, with each sequence being analyzed frame by frame. Each frame was thermally tuned by a certified thermographer

and each heat signature was evaluated individually on its own merit based upon size, shape, habit, and thermal characteristics. In total, over 105,000 individual frames were analyzed. The results of the aerial survey produced an average population density of 387 deer/mi² for all MetroParks properties. This average considered the number of thermal signatures documented within Park boundaries, in correlation with the total park acreage. Considering the excellent weather conditions and the detailed data review process, the surveyor indicated a high level of confidence in the results and provided an 85% or greater confidence interval. (Appendix A)

Trail Camera Surveys

Despite the comprehensive results provided by the infrared aerial survey, the MetroParks felt it was important to continue exploring additional survey methods to gain a better picture of not only population densities but also overall herd health. For this, the MetroParks employed trail camera surveys in July of 2022, beginning at Hitchcock Woods and the Mill Creek Wildlife Sanctuary. Following guidelines published by Mississippi State University and the National Deer Association, the MetroParks successfully used trail cameras to estimate localized population densities, gather information on herd structure, and visually assess the physical condition of the deer herd.

The results confirmed elevated populations densities within the surveyed areas as documented by the aerial infrared survey. Additionally, the results highlighted poor body condition in several of the surveyed deer, most notably those at Hitchcock Woods. (Appendix A)

Survey Accuracy

While there are numerous survey methods that may be employed to estimate wildlife populations, it is important to note that any one survey method is simply a snapshot in time and can only be considered accurate for the time, date, location, and weather conditions under which it was conducted. In the case of white-tailed deer, populations and their use of a particular property may fluctuate based upon factors such as time of day, time of year, weather conditions, food availability, or human pressure.

Critical Impacts

White-tailed deer are considered to be keystone herbivores in their environments meaning their feeding habits can have large scale impacts to the vegetative community and can subsequently impact other species of wildlife including birds, mammals, insects, amphibians, etc. While white-tailed deer are known as generalist herbivores, feeding on a wide range of woody and herbaceous plants they are also known as preferential browsers, meaning they have preferred species that they will gravitate towards when available. Many of these species are natives, such as red oak seedlings or spring wildflowers. When overabundant, the browsing impacts of white-tailed deer can have a disproportionate impact on those preferred species, allowing for the proliferation of less palatable plants (often invasive species) leading to an overall loss in biodiversity and increased habitat degradation overtime (Côté et al, 2004).

To better understand the negative effects an overabundance of deer can have on the environment, the carrying capacity of the land must be determined. Carrying capacity can be defined by multiple metrics:

Biological Carrying Capacity (BCC):

Biological carrying capacity can be described as the density in which a population (in this case white-tailed deer) can sustain themselves on the landscape over the long-term. This number can vary greatly depending upon the availability of food resources, it is common for biological carrying capacity in urban/suburban areas to be artificially elevated due to increased supplemental food sources (gardens, landscaping, supplemental feed, etc.) and a lack of predation. Despite white-tailed deer populations being able to sustain themselves on the landscape, populations at or below biological carrying capacity often have negative impacts on the surrounding environment and the health of the deer herd.

Ecological Carrying Capacity (ECC):

Ecological carrying capacity is the density in which white-tailed deer populations have no negative impacts to their surrounding environment and allow for natural regeneration of flora. When population densities exceed ecological carrying capacity, negative impacts associated with an overabundance of deer become apparent such as overbrowsing, a loss of biodiversity, and stunted forest regeneration. Ecological carrying capacity may vary across the landscape depending upon resource availability, but research indicates between 10-20 deer/mi² as the ideal range for ecological carrying capacity. Population levels beyond ECC can cause long lasting and/or permanent effects to the vegetative community onsite, affecting many other species of wildlife across all trophic levels.

Cultural Carrying Capacity (CCC):

Cultural or social carry capacity is the density in which white-tailed deer populations are socially tolerated in a community, this figure can vary greatly based upon public opinion and commonly exceeds both biological and ecological carry capacities.

For the purposes of white-tailed deer management in Mill Creek MetroParks, **ecological carrying capacity** will be the primary metric by which populations are evaluated.

Disease Concerns:

Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD) is a fatal neurologic disease found in North American members of the cervid family (white-tailed deer, mule deer, moose, reindeer, and elk). First discovered in Colorado (1967), this disease has now spread to thirty (30) U.S. State and four (4) Canadian Provinces including both captive breeding facilities and free-range herds. Unfortunately, Ohio has recently joined this list in 2020 with CWD being discovered in free-ranging populations. The current known distribution within Ohio is contained within Wyandot and Marion County in North Central Ohio.

Chronic wasting disease is categorized as a prion disease, similar to Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease (CJD) in humans or Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy (BSE or “Mad Cow”) in cattle. This disease has a long incubation period, infected animals could take years to show symptoms, but once developed a host of neurologic symptoms such as drastic weight loss, stumbling, and fatigue become severe, leading to death. Chronic wasting disease is 100% fatal, with no known treatments at this time.

CWD is transferred from animal to animal through close contact and also can be spread through the environment via carcasses, feces, saliva, etc. The risk of transmission is greatly increased in areas with high deer densities and once shed into the environment the CWD causing prions can remain infectious for years.

Despite the best efforts of management agencies, CWD has not been successfully eradicated once established in wild free-ranging herds. At this time, the best land management practice is to help mitigate the spread by maintaining healthy population levels and being cautious about transporting potentially infected animals or infected materials to new areas of the state.

At this time, there is no research to suggest that CWD, is capable of being transferred to humans.

Epizootic Hemorrhagic Disease (EHD) is one of the most common diseases that affect the white-tailed deer in North America, with Ohio often experiencing localized outbreaks throughout the state depending upon weather conditions. EHD is transmitted by a biting midge (a type of fly) that is most prevalent during the mid to late summer, as they thrive in the mudflats created by drought conditions.

As compared to chronic wasting disease, EHD is very fast acting, with infected deer often showing symptoms with 10 days of exposure and expiring within 36 hours of showing symptoms. Symptoms can include lethargy, loss of fear, swelling of the tongue, head and neck, and difficulty breathing – carcasses of affected deer are often found in or near bodies of water. Many factors contribute to how severe an EHD outbreak will be such as weather, location, and an individual's level of susceptibility to the disease. However, it is not uncommon for a large portion of a local population to be affected during an outbreak, especially in the Midwest where deer populations have built little genetic resistance to the disease.

EHD is not spread from animal to animal but having a high population density during a localized outbreak could result in very high mortality rates due to a high number of deer being exposed to infectious midges.

Lyme Disease and other tick-borne diseases have progressively increased in prevalence in recent years. White-tailed deer, a primary host of the black-legged tick (*Ixodes scapularis*), aka “deer tick”, have experienced a similar rise in population over a similar timeframe and created a notable correlation.

Lyme disease is the most common vector borne disease in the United States, affecting approximately 30,000 people annually. This disease is caused primarily by the bacterium *Borrelia burgdorferi* and is transferred through the bite of a black-legged tick. Research directly linking deer population levels to human health is admittedly lacking in some regard, however, numerous studies have shown in controlled situations that the reduction of deer densities can have a direct influence on tick populations (Kugeler, et al 2015). Perhaps most notably, research conducted in Connecticut over a thirteen (13) year period that by decreasing deer population densities to 5.1 deer/km² yielded a 76% reduction in tick abundance, 70% reduction in the entomological risk index, and 80% reduction in resident-reported cases of Lyme disease in the community from before to after a hunt was initiated (Kilpatrick, et al 2014)

While white-tailed deer are the preferred host of the black-legged tick, other species (mice, chipmunks, birds, other mammals, etc.) can fill this void in areas where deer are less numerous. This coupled with the inevitable immigration/emigration of deer in an open population make it difficult to assess the effects of a deer reduction program regarding tick populations and human health on the large scale.

Property Damage

In addition to the threat white-tailed deer populations pose to natural ecosystems, they can also cause significant negative impacts to personal property and the community. The most common community impacts are damage to landscaping or gardens and damage or personal injury caused by deer-vehicle collisions.

Landscape Damage

When overabundant, populations of white-tailed deer can quickly deplete natural food sources which often leads to the browsing of landscape and/or garden plants, even those that are traditionally not favored by deer or considered to be “deer resistant”. Damage caused by the overbrowsing of landscape and garden plants can cause significant financial impacts to landowners to replace damaged plants and/or erect deer exclosure measures.

Deer Vehicle Collisions

Deer vehicle collisions (DVC) are an ever-present threat to the motorists of Ohio, this threat increases in areas of high deer density and can fluctuate seasonally throughout the year. Crash data from the Ohio State Highway Patrol (2015-2019) shows Mahoning County as having a high incidence of deer-vehicle collisions ranking 15th out of 88 counties with a total of 1,696 collisions (~424 per year).

Additionally, records from ODOT show an upward trend in the number of deer picked up by road crews in Mahoning County over the last seven (7) years (2015-2022), peaking at 277 deer in 2022.

Deer vehicle collisions pose both a financial and physical threat to motorists with an average cost of \$4,000 of damaged caused per DVC and the possibility of injury or even death as a result of the collision.

We Are Not Alone

The issue of white-tailed deer overpopulation is a problem that is facing many communities across the nation, with Ohio being no exception. Many peers at other Park Districts throughout the region are actively managing white-tailed deer populations on their properties, in some cases for two decades or more. Perhaps the most notable example being Cleveland MetroParks, which has been involved with intense monitoring and active management of their deer herd since the 1990s.

Other regional county park districts with deer management activities include:

- Trumbull MetroParks
- Ashtabula County MetroParks
- Columbiana County Park District
- Friendship Park, Jefferson County
- Erie MetroParks
- Lake MetroParks
- Summit MetroParks
- Stark Parks
- Cleveland MetroParks
- Geauga Park District:
- Portage County Parks
- Medina County Parks
- Toledo MetroParks

In addition to other park districts, numerous other organizations throughout the region also actively manage deer populations on their properties such as:

- Holden Arboretum
- The Nature Conservancy
- Cleveland Museum of Natural History
- Cuyahoga Valley National Park
- Western Reserve Land Conservancy

In addition, a long list of municipalities throughout the region are also facing this issue such as such as the City of Mentor, Avon Lake, Pepper Pike, and Solon.

Many of these same organizations are members of the Lake Erie Allegheny Partnership for Biodiversity (LEAP), which is a regional alliance dedicated to the conservation of our natural resources that recognizes the need for sustainable management of white-tailed deer populations and supports active management.

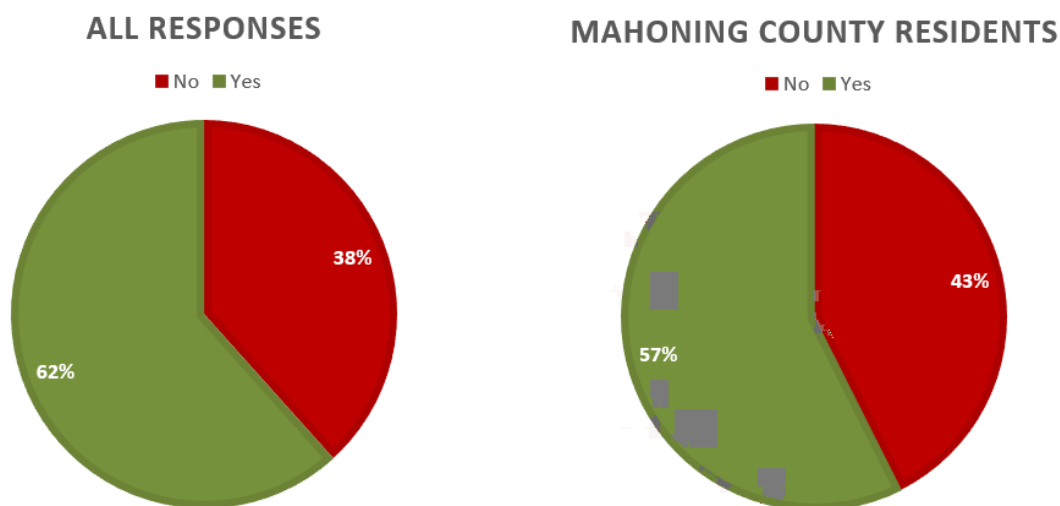
Public Input:

Following the presentation of “White-tailed Deer in the MetroParks – Part I” on February 13th, 2023, the MetroParks conducted an online survey (February 14, 2023 – March 1, 2023) to evaluate the experiences and opinions of the public regarding white-tailed deer populations on MetroParks properties. The result of that survey effort yielded the following results:

- 407 verified responses (all emails were verified by a 3rd party service provider)
- 74% of all survey respondents were Mahoning County residents
- 78% of all survey respondents stated Mill Creek Park or Fellows Riverside Gardens as their most visited property, 80% of county residents indicated the same.
- 57% of all survey respondents stated that based upon their experiences in the park that they feel there is an overpopulation of white-tailed deer, 53% of county residents indicated the same.
- 62% of all survey respondents stated that they believe steps should be taken to address the white-tailed deer population in the MetroParks, 57% of county residents indicated the same.

The MetroParks reviewed the survey responses in great detail and will use public input to help shape management recommendations moving forward. Public input is an important component; however, it is important to note that scientific research is the primary tool used by land managers to guide wildlife management under the North American Model of Wildlife Conservation. These two components must be balanced to successfully reach management goals.

Do you think something needs to be done to address the deer population within the MetroParks?



Independent Survey Efforts

Following both the, February 13th and March 13th, 2023 presentations to the Board of Park Commissioners, The Vindicator conducted an online survey of their own to help gauge the public's position on the subject of White-tailed Deer in the MetroParks.

The first survey effort asked the question "Does Mill Creek MetroParks have a Deer Problem?". In total, 54% of survey respondents said "yes" that they believe the MetroParks has a deer problem.

The second survey asked the question "Do you support the MetroParks' Plan to Reduce Deer Numbers?". In total, 61% of survey respondents indicated "yes", that they support the MetroParks' proposed management plan.

MCMP Natural Resources Citizen Advisory Committee

Created in 2020, the Natural Resources Citizen Advisory Committee is comprised of 9 members of the public and the MCMP Natural Resources Manager and serves as an advisory committee to the Board of Park Commissioners and provides recommendations on natural resources related projects. This committee met on February 14th, 2023 and March 17th, 2023 to review and discuss the subject of White-tailed Deer in the MetroParks. After reviewing Part I and Part II of the presentation series, the group voted on March 17th, 2023 to pass a motion supporting the MetroParks' plan to reduce and manage white-tailed deer populations – the motion passed 6 to 1, with the MCMP Natural Resources Manager abstaining from the vote.

Past Efforts

Once again, before moving forward, the MetroParks looked to the past and examined previous management activities and assessed their successes and failures.

In response to population estimates and ecological impacts at the time, the MetroParks instituted an archery-only controlled hunting program in Hitchcock and Huntington Woods, and eventually including Mill Creek Park south of Shields Road. The controlled hunt ran for a total of three (3) seasons (1998-2001) utilizing licensed hunters to remove deer from these priority locations.

No active management of white-tailed deer populations on MetroParks properties has taken place since 2001.

Management Authority

In the State of Ohio, the Ohio Department of Natural Resources: Division of Wildlife (ODOW) is tasked with managing the State's deer herd. Management by the Division of Wildlife is done in accordance with current scientific research and best management practices to ensure the health and longevity of the resource.

To effectively manage Ohio's herd, the Ohio Division of Wildlife regulates the white-tailed deer as a big game species, allowing for regulated harvest each season by licensed hunters. Annual harvest rates in Ohio have averaged 193,062 in recent years (2019-2021), with Mahoning County accounting for 2,007 harvests annually (on average) over the same time frame. It is estimated that approximately 230,596 hunters participated in the 2021-2022 deer season. With these hunters purchasing approximately 404,800 deer permits across the state (~36.2% hunter success rate). During the same license year Mahoning County accounted for 2,178 hunting licenses and 2,688 deer permits sold.

*Success rate defined as percentage of licensed hunters who harvested a deer in the 2021-2022 deer season. Some successful hunters may harvest multiple deer per season.

As the keystone herbivore in Ohio, the regulated harvest of our deer herd is essential to maintain the balanced and diverse native ecosystems of our state. It is common for white-tailed deer numbers to exceed ecological carrying capacity in urban or suburban areas where traditional hunting practices do not typically take place. To allow for the sustainable management of deer in these areas, the Ohio Division of Wildlife may issue deer damage permits on a case-by-case basis that go beyond the scope of typical seasons and/or harvest limits to meet management objectives.

Our Plan

Based upon current survey data regarding overall deer densities and ecosystem health, the MetroParks is recommending the implementation of a facility-based management program to reduce and manage white-tailed deer populations on MetroParks properties. This program will employ a combination of the proven options currently authorized by the Ohio Division of Wildlife. These recommendations are based upon current scientific research and best management practices.

Ohio Division of Wildlife – Approved Management Methods

Controlled Hunting Program:

The use of regulated hunting has proven to be a safe, effective, and ethical tool to manage wildlife populations for long term-sustainability at the national, state and local level.

Controlled hunting programs have been successfully implemented by other park districts and municipalities across the state to successfully manage white-tailed deer populations in urban, suburban, and rural environments.

Targeted Removal Program:

A targeted removal program is a safe, effective, and ethical method of management and is primarily utilized in urban/suburban areas. A targeted removal program operates outside of normal hunting regulations as defined by the Ohio Division of Wildlife (ODOW), therefore, requires the issuance of “deer damage permits”. These damage permits are issued on a case-by-case basis at the discretion of ODOW in circumstances where the need for deer management exceeds the ability of typical hunting activities to be effective or are simply not feasible.

Do Nothing or Let Nature Take its Course:

To simply do nothing would only exacerbate the problem that has been compounding for over two decades. “Letting Nature Take its Course” would result in the further decimation of our natural ecosystems and the continued decline in the health of our deer herd, potentially resulting in disease outbreak and/or starvation. This approach does not allow for the responsible and sustainable management of our natural resources.

Ohio Division of Wildlife – Non-Approved Management Methods

Trap and Relocate:

Relocation is not considered a viable option for deer management for numerous reasons. These reasons include the lack of viable release sites, potential disease transmission, high associated costs, and a high degree of mortality with relocated individuals due to the stress of transfer. Research has indicated highly variable mortality rates as high as 20% (Haulton et al 2001). Long-term survivability of white-tailed deer that have been relocated has been documented as low as 30% after one year (Beringer et al 2002).

Relocation is **not** currently permitted by ODOW for use in deer management programs.

Surgical Contraception:

Surgical contraception has been employed by other organizations as part of their deer management. Perhaps the most notable example is Cornell University where an extensive surgical contraceptive program was implemented on the main university campus. Despite a dedicated effort this program proved extremely costly (~\$1000/deer despite utilizing in-house veterinary services) and did not prove effective in achieving management goals on campus.

Cornell University did see a decline in overall pregnancies on campus, however, they concluded that surgical contraception did **not** have a measurable impact on deer populations over the long-term despite having sterilized nearly 90% of female deer on campus. They attributed the ineffectiveness to population immigration and emigration associated with an open population (Boulanger et al 2014).

Surgical contraceptive does not directly address the current population levels, rather it may only stabilize current populations and show a reduction in future fawn recruitment. This method has proven to be to extremely costly and ultimately ineffective at managing population levels of wild free-ranging white-tailed deer.

Surgical contraception is permitted **only** for research purposes and is **not** currently permitted by the Ohio Division of Wildlife to be used in deer management programs. Any research proposal presented to the Ohio Division of Wildlife must be conducted by a legitimate research entity, have clearly defined goals, and must identify **novel** research topics.

The MetroParks will continue to evaluate the feasibility of surgical fertility control for use in deer management programs as science and technology progresses.

Chemical Contraception:

Multiple chemical contraception compounds have been researched and trialed by numerous organizations for use in white-tailed deer such as GonaCon™ or PZP. In the early 2000s, Cleveland MetroParks (under research permits) expended nearly \$500,000 over 5 years researching immunocontraception as a non-lethal alternative to reduce deer numbers. Their results did show a reduction in overall pregnancies but was proven **not viable** in an open population due to immigration/emigration of deer into and out of the study area (Cleveland MetroParks).

As with surgical contraceptive, this method does not directly address the current population levels, rather it may only stabilize current populations and show a reduction in future fawn recruitment. This method has proven to be to extremely costly and ultimately ineffective at managing population levels of wild free-ranging white-tailed deer.

Chemical contraception is permitted **only** for research purposes and is **not** currently permitted by the Ohio Division of Wildlife to be used in deer management programs. Any research proposal presented to the Ohio Division of Wildlife must be conducted by a legitimate research entity, have clearly defined goals, and must identify **novel** research topics.

The MetroParks will continue to evaluate the feasibility of immunocontraception for use in deer management programs as science and technology progresses.

Other Alternative Considered

Chemical Repellent, Physical Deterrent, Noise Makers, and Exclosure Fencing:

Chemical repellents have mixed reviews, but may prove useful in controlled landscaping situations, however, repellents must be reapplied frequently depending upon weather conditions.

Physical repellents such as motion activated sprinklers, may also prove useful in controlled landscaping situations where a water source is available. Other physical deterrents such as

predator decoys or scarecrows provide only temporary results, as deer will become habituated to their presence over time.

Noise makers may also provide limited success in the short term however, the use of these devices must be timed during peak movements hours (dawn, dusk, and through the night). Over time, deer will become habituated to the use of these devices, especially in urban/suburban areas where human activity and loud noises are normal occurrences.

Exclosure fencing is very effective in both controlled landscape situations and natural areas when installed correctly, however, fencing large areas is extremely cost prohibitive and would detract from natural settings. Exclosure fencing is best utilized around browse sensitive landscape plants, small scale planting plots, or small naturalized areas for research and education.

The MetroParks has and will continue to utilize the various non-lethal deterrents described above singly or in combination when conditions are appropriate.

Recommended Management Options:

Controlled Hunting Program:

The implementation of a controlled hunting program, where deemed safe and ecologically feasible on MetroParks properties, in partnership with the Ohio Division of Wildlife is the preferred management technique of the MetroParks.

Recommended properties for the implementation of a controlled hunting program include:

- Collier Preserve
- MetroParks Farm
- Sawmill Creek Preserve
- Mill Creek Wildlife Sanctuary
- Springfield Forest
- Hawkins Marsh
- Vickers Nature Preserve
- Huntington Woods
- Hitchcock Woods

These properties have been deemed safe for controlled hunting opportunities due to their overall size and/or their rural location within the county. In addition, these properties have all been identified as having white-tailed deer populations exceeding ecological carrying capacity, as evidenced by current population estimates and/or an unacceptable level of deer browsing documented by MetroParks staff.

At the time of this writing, local ordinances in the Village of Sebring prohibit hunting and the use of firearms within Village limits, therefore, controlled hunting is **not** being recommended at Sebring Woods in 2023 despite this property demonstrating the need for active management.

The MetroParks will be reviewing legal precedents and hopes to work with the Village of Sebring to stress the importance of deer management in this area for the health and longevity of our natural areas, leading to effective management taking place in future years.

Structure and Logistics:

- All controlled hunting opportunities will be by permit only.
- Permits will be issued through a lottery drawing conducted by the Ohio Division of Wildlife (ODOW).
- All applicants must meet the minimum participation standards set forth by the ODOW, including a valid hunting license and either-sex and/or antlerless deer permit(s).
- Permitted hunters will be assigned a hunt unit, hunters may not actively pursue game outside of their assigned hunt unit.
- Hunt units will be established on a facility-by-facility basis based upon existing site conditions.
- Controlled hunting opportunities will be archery only, unless otherwise noted – where deemed safe, select regional facilities located in rural areas of the county will have separate firearm hunting opportunities.
- Archery permit periods for selected hunters will be 1-week in length, with eight (8) separate permit windows beginning on October 1st and continuing into late November. Properties such as Hitchcock Woods and Huntington Woods which are archery only will have a total of sixteen (16) permit windows which will extend through January.
- Firearm permit periods will be 2-days in length, with five (5) separate permit windows being allotted for firearms hunts which will take place every other weekend through December and January.
- All facilities will remain open to the public during archery season and applicable facilities will be closed to the public during firearms hunts.
- **Hunters are not permitted to harvest any deer exhibiting a unique color phase (albino, piebald, melanistic, etc.).**

A list of MetroParks controlled hunting rules and regulations will be provided to each hunter. These rules, in addition to the MCMP park-wide rules and regulations and ODOW statewide hunting regulations will be enforceable by MCMP Police and/or the County Wildlife Officer. Please see appendix (D) for the full list of MCMP Controlled Hunting Rules and Regulations.

Pros and Cons of a Controlled Hunting Program:

Pros

- Proven as a safe, effective, and ethical means of population management, as demonstrated at the state and local level by ODNR and a long list of other park districts, non-profit organizations, and municipalities in Northeast Ohio.
- Minimizes impacts to the public use of facilities – hunt units are designed to minimize potential conflicts.
- Requires minimal financial input from the MetroParks.

Cons

- Success relies on the effort put forth by each individual hunter, varying from person to person. Multiple hunters utilizing the same hunt unit throughout the season based upon rotating permit periods will help alleviate this concern.
- Accuracy of harvest reporting will also rely upon the participation of each hunter, which may vary. Having two (2) separate methods of reporting (one to MCMP and one to ODOH) will help highlight any inaccuracies.

Controlled Hunting Harvest Estimates

As previously stated, the success of the controlled hunting program is largely dependent upon the individual hunter with overall success rates of other ODNR controlled hunting opportunities being approximately 20%. Success rate in this scenario is defined as a permit holder who utilizes their permit and successfully harvests a deer as part of the controlled hunt.

Success rate can be influenced by numerous factors such as weather, time of year, and hunter effort/participation.

The following table represents the number of permits that will be issued and an **estimated** number of deer which will be harvested from each respective property:

Facility	Huntible Acreage	# of Archery Permits per Period	Total # of Archery Permit Holders (Annually)	# of Firearm Permits per Period	Total # of Firearm Permit Holders (Annually)	Total # Combined Permit Holders (Annually)	Harvest Estimate (~20% Success Rate*)
MetroParks Farm	50	1	8	1	5	13	3-6
Sawmill Creek	128	3	24	2	10	34	7-14
Vickers Nature Preserve	225	3	24	3	15	39	8-16
Hawkins Marsh	128	2	16	2	10	26	5-11
Collier Preserve	162	3	24	3	15	39	8-16
MC Wildlife Sanctuary	422	4	32	3	15	47	9-18
Springfield Forest	82	2	16	1	5	21	4-8
Hitchcock Woods	489	5	80	0	0	80	16-32
Huntington Woods	223	2	32	0	0	32	6-12
Totals	1,942	25	256	15	75	331	66 -133

*Harvest estimates are based upon success rates of hunters participating in other ODNR controlled hunting opportunities and may fluctuate based upon partner participation.

The number of permits issued for each respective property may vary annually to meet management objectives. If annual harvests via controlled hunting fail to meet the short and/or long-term management objectives for a given property, additional management techniques such as targeted removal may be employed to supplement efforts.

Targeted Removal Program:

Structure and Logistics:

It is recommended that a targeted removal program be implemented by the MetroParks in partnership with United States Department of Agriculture (USDA): APHIS Wildlife Services, under the jurisdiction of the Ohio Division of Wildlife (ODOW). Under this structure, the MetroParks would work with USDA and utilize federally employed professional marksmen to reach harvest quotas in accordance with deer damage permits issued by the ODOW in areas where controlled hunting is not feasible or where controlled hunting alone fails to meet management objectives.

USDA, APHIS WS will be responsible for site selection (in conjunction with MCMP Police), site preparation, harvesting, field processing, data collection, and transportation of harvested deer to a butchering facility to be processed for donation. All meat from harvested deer will be donated to the community through local food banks and/or other outreach programs. On average a single mature deer can provide over 200 meals (1/4 pound servings) of high quality protein to those in need.

***Any deer exhibiting a unique color phase (albino, piebald, melanistic, etc.) would not be harvested as part of any targeted removal program implemented on MCMP property.**

Properties recommended for the implementation of a targeted removal program include:

- Mill Creek Park (South of Midlothian Blvd.)
- Huntington Woods
- Hitchcock Woods

The properties recommended for a targeted removal program have all been identified as having white-tailed deer populations exceeding ecological carrying capacity, as evidenced by current population estimates and/or an unacceptable level of deer browsing documented by MetroParks staff.

Controlled hunting was deemed to either not be a viable management technique or was considered best used in combination with targeted removal in these areas to achieve management objectives due to safety concerns, high public usage of the facility, the total available acreage, and/or the lack of hunter accessibility to a given property.

At the time of this writing, local ordinances in both the City of Youngstown and the City of Struthers prohibit hunting and the use of firearms within city limits.

Moving forward in 2023, targeted removal efforts are **not** being recommended in the portion of Mill Creek Park which resides in the City of Youngstown (north of Midlothian Blvd.) or Yellow Creek Park despite these properties demonstrating the need for active management.

The MetroParks will be reviewing legal precedents and hopes to work with these municipalities to stress the importance of deer management in these areas for the health and longevity of our natural areas, leading to effective management taking place in future years.

Pros and Cons of a Targeted Removal Program:

Pros

- Very effective means of herd reduction. Targeted removal programs can operate outside of normal hunting regulations, therefore, can quickly outpace a controlled hunting program depending upon the number of permits granted and can more effectively reach short-term management goals.
- Use of highly trained federal marksmen to safely manage deer numbers.
- Is considered an ethical means of management by the American Veterinary Medical Association (AVMA).
- Ability to collect scientific data. Data collected from each deer would allow the MetroParks to effectively track herd health over time include age demographics, weight, sex ratios, disease transmission, etc.
- Meat donation. All harvested deer will be processed and donated to a local food bank or other community outreach program providing over 200 meals per mature deer to those in need.

Cons

- High associated costs. This method will require a significant financial input by the MetroParks to implement an effective targeted removal program in partnership with USDA Wildlife Services. These costs would include administration fees (site preparation, harvesting, transport, data collection, etc.) and the butchering fees which is estimated to be ~\$111.00 per deer in 2023.
- Would require facility closure, may impact public use. All work would be done after normal park hours, however, public use in some areas may be negatively impacted in the short-term.

Targeted Removal Harvest Estimates

The number of deer removed via the targeted removal program will be strictly governed by the Ohio Division of Wildlife (ODOW) through the issuance of deer damage permits.

In 2023, the MetroParks anticipates requesting 50 - 100 deer damage permits to be utilized in Mill Creek Park (south of Midlothian Blvd.), Huntington Woods, and Hitchcock Woods. Mill Creek Park will remain the primary focus for targeted removal efforts in 2023, additional efforts at Huntington Woods and Hitchcock Woods will take place after the controlled hunting program has concluded for the year, as budget allows.

Additional permits may be requested based upon situational need, as budget allows. A request for additional permits is subject to approval by the ODOW.

The MetroParks is currently working with the Ohio Division of Wildlife to finalize short and long-term management thresholds and objectives for the targeted removal program.

Management Goals

Both the Ohio Division of Wildlife and Mill Creek MetroParks do not support, nor does the implementation of this management plan suggest, that white-tailed deer will be eliminated from MetroParks properties. Rather, the population will be reduced to a level within ecological carrying capacity to mitigate the negative ecological impacts caused by overbrowsing and enhance the overall biodiversity of all native species of plants and wildlife.

The management of white-tailed deer populations within Mill Creek MetroParks will be a long-term endeavor, the success of this management plan will be achieved through the gradual but consistent harvest of white-tailed deer on an annual basis, which over time will lead to sustainable population levels.

Short and long-term management goals have been established to guide management activities and provide a timeline towards success.

Short-Term Goals:

- Restore ecological balance by reducing population densities of white-tailed deer on MetroParks properties to within recommended carrying capacity using best management practices.
- Enhance and restore areas previously damaged by overbrowsing and other negative impacts associated with an overabundance of white-tailed deer through sound habitat management.

Timeline:

- 5-10 Years

Long- Term Goals:

- Manage white-tailed deer populations on MetroParks property in a sustainable fashion, within ecological carrying capacity in perpetuity using best management practices.
- Maintain a balanced and diverse ecosystem, focused on the biodiversity of native plants and wildlife.

Timeline:

- 10+ Years

Determining Success:

In order to achieve the desired management goals, the long-term and consistent implementation of this management plan is key to achieve and maintain ecological balance. Success will not be determined purely on number of deer removed or population densities of future surveys, but rather success shall be measured by the health and vitality of our forest resources, including the deer herd.

An integrated survey program will be used to continue monitoring our deer herd and forest health in future years and harvest quotas will be adjusted accordingly as we achieve management goals.

Continued Survey Methods:

- Repeated aerial infrared surveys
- Trail camera monitoring

Additional Survey Methods to be Considered:

- Helicopter surveys as weather permits (non-infrared)
- Browse surveys
- Vegetation surveys

An annual evaluation of management activities will be conducted and presented to the MetroParks Board of Park Commissioners. Annual adjustments will be made based upon the successes and failures of the previous season to refine the overall program and continue moving towards the established management goals.

Education and Communication:

Education and communication will remain key components in both the short and long-term to the success of the Mill Creek MetroParks: White-tailed Deer Management Plan.

Educational components will include:

- A dedicated webpage to deer management within the MetroParks, with all relevant information being available to the public.
- Educational programming surrounding the ecology of the white-tailed deer and the impact they have on their local ecosystems.
- Annual report of management activities being presented to the Board of Park Commissioners and being made available on the website.

Supporting Documentation:

1. Appendix A: Current Data – Survey Results
2. Appendix B: Deer Damage Photographic Log
3. Appendix C: Description of Properties
4. Appendix D: Controlled Hunt Program Structure
5. Appendix E: Browse Preference of Regional Plant Species

Appendix A: Survey Results



AERIAL INFRARED SURVEY: RESULTS FOR ALL PARKS

				THERMAL SIGNATURES OBSERVED WITHIN PARK BOUNDARIES			
	PARK	PARK SIZE (ACRES)	PARK SIZE (SQ MILES)	COUNT	ACRES PER DEER	DEER PER ACRE	DEER PER SQ MILE
CENTRAL	MILL CREEK PARK	1,626	2.54	903	1.80	0.56	355
	HITCHCOCK WOODS	689	1.08	429	1.61	0.62	398
	HUNTINGTON WOODS	383	0.60	354	1.08	0.92	592
	MILL CREEK WILDLIFE SANCTUARY	482	0.75	267	1.81	0.55	355
	COLLIER PRESERVE	303	0.47	124	2.44	0.41	262
EAST	McGUFFY WILDLIFE PRESERVE	78	0.12	48	1.63	0.62	394
	YELLOW CREEK PARK	76	0.12	80	0.95	1.05	674
	SPRINGFIELD FOREST	89	0.14	69	1.29	0.78	496
	CRANBERRY RUN HEADWATERS	27	0.04	19	1.42	0.70	450
WEST	VICKERS NATURE PRESERVE	262	0.41	116	2.26	0.44	283
	SEBRING WOODS	39	0.06	37	1.05	0.95	607
	EGYPT SWAMP PRESERVE	75	0.12	54	1.39	0.72	461
	SAWMILL CREEK PRESERVE	167	0.26	141	1.18	0.84	540
	METROPARKS FARM	402	0.63	197	2.04	0.49	314
	HAWKINS MARSH	161	0.25	97	1.66	0.60	386
TOTALS AND AVERAGES:		4,859	7.59	2,935	1.66	0.60	387

RECOMMENDED POPULATION DENSITIES ARE 10-20 DEER/Mi²
TO REMAIN BELOW ECOLOGICAL CARRYING CAPACITY.

OUR RESULTS AVERAGE 387 DEER/Mi²

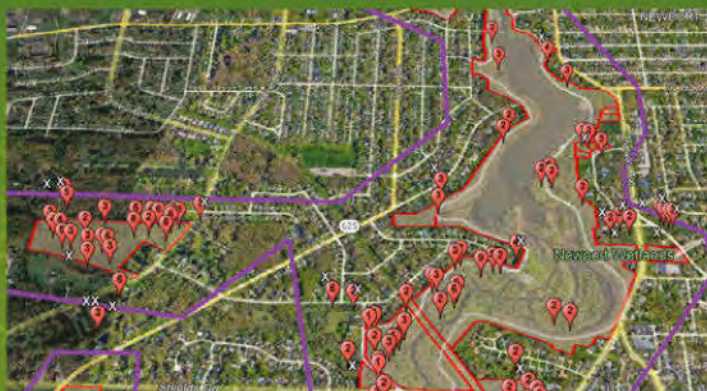
MILL CREEK PARK

1626 ACRES SURVEYED (2.54 MI²) | 903 DEER DETECTED* | 355 DEER/MI² (MCP TOTALS)

NORTH OF ROUTE 62



SHIELDS ROAD TO ROUTE 62



ROUTE 224 TO SHIELDS ROAD



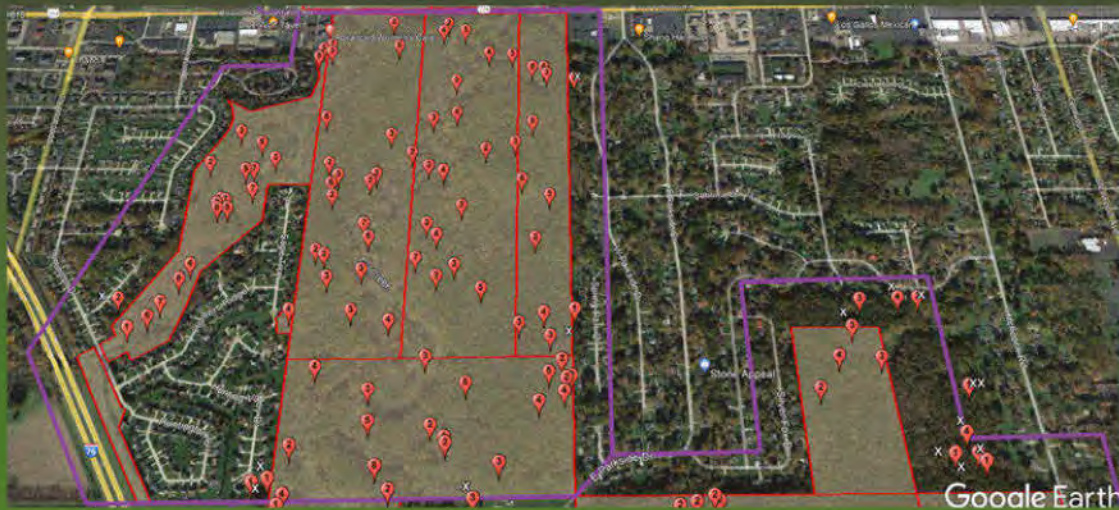
- EACH PIN REPRESENTS A HEAT SIGNATURE CONSISTENT WITH THAT OF A DEER WITH A CONFIDENCE INTERVAL $\geq 85\%$
- THE NUMBER INSIDE EACH PIN INDICATES THE NUMBER OF HEAT SIGNATURES PRESENT
- PINS MARKED WITH "X" FALL OUTSIDE MCMP BOUNDARIES BUT WITHIN THE ~400' BUFFER AREA
- PINS MARKED WITH "XX" FALL OUTSIDE OF THE BUFFER AREA

*DEER/MI² FIGURES BASED UPON HEAT SIGNATURES OBSERVED WITHIN METROPARKS BOUNDARIES.



HUNTINGTON WOODS

383 ACRES SURVEYED (0.60 MI²) | 354 DEER DETECTED* | 592 DEER/MI²



HITCHCOCK WOODS

689 ACRES SURVEYED (1.06 MI²) | 429 DEER DETECTED* | 398 DEER/MI²



- EACH PIN REPRESENTS A HEAT SIGNATURE CONSISTENT WITH THAT OF A DEER WITH A CONFIDENCE INTERVAL $\geq 85\%$
- THE NUMBER INSIDE EACH PIN INDICATES THE NUMBER OF HEAT SIGNATURES PRESENT
- PINS MARKED WITH "X" FALL OUTSIDE MCMP BOUNDARIES BUT WITHIN THE ~400' BUFFER AREA
- PINS MARKED WITH "XX" FALL OUTSIDE OF THE BUFFER AREA

*DEER/MI² FIGURES BASED UPON HEAT SIGNATURES OBSERVED WITHIN METROPARKS BOUNDARIES.

► COLLIER PRESERVE

303 ACRES SURVEYED (0.47 MI²) | 124 DEER DETECTED* | 262 DEER/MI²



► MILL CREEK WILDLIFE SANCTUARY

482 ACRES SURVEYED (0.75 MI²) | 267 DEER DETECTED* | 355 DEER/MI²



- EACH PIN REPRESENTS A HEAT SIGNATURE CONSISTENT WITH THAT OF A DEER WITH A CONFIDENCE INTERVAL $\geq 85\%$
- THE NUMBER INSIDE EACH PIN INDICATES THE NUMBER OF HEAT SIGNATURES PRESENT
- PINS MARKED WITH "X" FALL OUTSIDE MCMP BOUNDARIES BUT WITHIN THE ~400' BUFFER AREA
- PINS MARKED WITH "XX" FALL OUTSIDE OF THE BUFFER AREA

*DEER/MI² FIGURES BASED UPON HEAT SIGNATURES OBSERVED WITHIN METROPARKS BOUNDARIES.

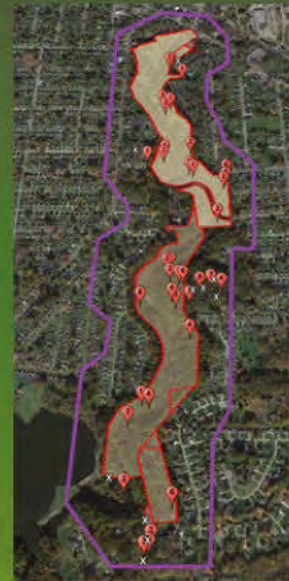
▶ **McGUFFY WILDLIFE PRESERVE**

78 ACRES SURVEYED (0.12 MI²)
48 DEER DETECTED* | 394 DEER/MI²



▶ **YELLOW CREEK PARK**

76 ACRES SURVEYED (0.12 MI²)
80 DEER DETECTED* | 674 DEER/MI²



▶ **SPRINGFIELD FOREST**

89 ACRES SURVEYED (0.14 MI²) | 69 DEER DETECTED* | 496 DEER/MI²



- EACH PIN REPRESENTS A HEAT SIGNATURE CONSISTENT WITH THAT OF A DEER WITH A CONFIDENCE INTERVAL $\geq 85\%$
- THE NUMBER INSIDE EACH PIN INDICATES THE NUMBER OF HEAT SIGNATURES PRESENT
- PINS MARKED WITH "X" FALL OUTSIDE MCMP BOUNDARIES BUT WITHIN THE ~400' BUFFER AREA
- PINS MARKED WITH "XX" FALL OUTSIDE OF THE BUFFER AREA

*DEER/MI² FIGURES BASED UPON HEAT SIGNATURES OBSERVED WITHIN METROPARKS BOUNDARIES.

HAWKINS MARSH

161 ACRES SURVEYED (0.25 MI²)
97 DEER DETECTED* | 386 DEER/MI²



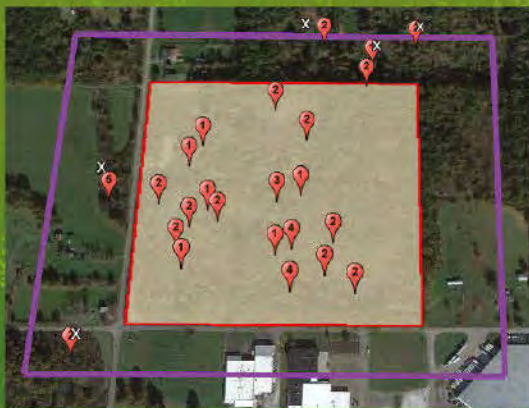
EGYPT SWAMP PRESERVE

75 ACRES SURVEYED (0.12 MI²)
54 DEER DETECTED* | 461 DEER/MI²



SEBRING WOODS

39 ACRES SURVEYED (0.06 MI²)
37 DEER DETECTED* | 607 DEER/MI²



- EACH PIN REPRESENTS A HEAT SIGNATURE CONSISTENT WITH THAT OF A DEER WITH A CONFIDENCE INTERVAL $\geq 85\%$
- THE NUMBER INSIDE EACH PIN INDICATES THE NUMBER OF HEAT SIGNATURES PRESENT
- PINS MARKED WITH "X" FALL OUTSIDE MCMP BOUNDARIES BUT WITHIN THE ~400' BUFFER AREA
- PINS MARKED WITH "XX" FALL OUTSIDE OF THE BUFFER AREA

*DEER/MI² FIGURES BASED UPON HEAT SIGNATURES OBSERVED WITHIN METROPARKS BOUNDARIES.

▶ SAWMILL CREEK PRESERVE

167 ACRES SURVEYED (0.25 MI²) | 97 DEER DETECTED* | 386 DEER/MI²



▶ METROPARKS FARM

402 ACRES SURVEYED (0.63 MI²)
197 DEER DETECTED* | 314 DEER/MI²



▶ VICKERS NATURE PRESERVE

262 ACRES SURVEYED (0.41 MI²)
1166 DEER DETECTED* | 283 DEER/MI²



- EACH PIN REPRESENTS A HEAT SIGNATURE CONSISTENT WITH THAT OF A DEER WITH A CONFIDENCE INTERVAL $\geq 85\%$
- THE NUMBER INSIDE EACH PIN INDICATES THE NUMBER OF HEAT SIGNATURES PRESENT
- PINS MARKED WITH "X" FALL OUTSIDE MCMP BOUNDARIES BUT WITHIN THE ~400' BUFFER AREA
- PINS MARKED WITH "XX" FALL OUTSIDE OF THE BUFFER AREA

*DEER/MI² FIGURES BASED UPON HEAT SIGNATURES OBSERVED WITHIN METROPARKS BOUNDARIES.



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Aerial Infrared Deer Survey Report

Mill Creek MetroParks Mahoning County, OH

Dates of aerial scans:

January 21 / 22 and 26 / 27, 2022

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P.O. Box 1283 Medina, OH 44258

In Cleveland: 216.619.7979 In Medina: 330.441.4916
Toll Free: 877.AIR.PIX.6 (877.247.7496) Toll Free Fax: 877.AIR.PIX.5 (877.247.7495)

Introduction and Background:

Aerial infrared wildlife scans are widely regarded as the most accurate way to determine animal populations and distribution.

Infrared sensors are used to detect the body heat produced by large animals, such as deer, which is greater than the surface temperatures of their surroundings.

To minimize the effect of solar heating on the surrounding area, it is most effective to conduct an infrared survey after sunset.

In order to be able to see as much as possible, infrared wildlife scans must be done after the leaves have fallen from the trees in autumn and before the trees bud out again in the spring.

Furthermore, the winter months are preferable for conducting infrared scans as there will be a bigger temperature difference between the animals and their surroundings. Snow cover is also beneficial.

Methods:

Our infrared scan was done utilizing one of FLIR's latest and most advanced infrared cameras which has a resolution that is currently among the highest available in commercial and scientific infrared cameras.

The infrared scan was done via airplane flying at a constant altitude. Due to the varying topography of the area, the altitude above the ground varied between approximately 1,000 feet and 1,200 feet.

Fifteen (15) parks were scanned per outlines provided by the client. The total area of the parks surveyed was approximately 4,859 acres, or 7.6 square miles. The total area surveyed, including perimeter buffers (300'–400') and internal areas that were not actually part of the parks was over 8,900 acres, or 13.9 square miles.

Methods (cont'd):

The sites were irregularly shaped and individual flight plans were created to ensure complete coverage of every park, including an approximately 300'–400' buffer zone around each park.

The “central area” of the park system, consisting of Mill Creek Park, Hitchcock Woods, Huntington Woods, Mill Creek Wildlife Preserve, and Collier Preserve, were all flown together as one big area on the first night of the survey (January 21 /22, 2022).

The parks to the east of the central area (McGuffey Wildlife Preserve, Yellow Creek, Springfield Forest, and Cranberry Run Headwaters) and to the west of the central area (Vickers Nature Preserve, Sebring Woods, Egypt Swamp Preserve, Sawmill Creek, Metro Parks Farm, and Hawkins Marsh), were flown individually on the second night of the survey (January 26/27).

Flight line headings (directions) for each work area were chosen based on the highest efficiency for each site. Flight lines were spaced approximately 375 feet apart. This allowed for approximately 30% overlap in the coverage from one line to the next to ensure that there were no gaps in the coverage due to wind, turbulence, or human error.

Radiometric sequences (thermal infrared "videos") were recorded continuously for each flight line at a frame rate of at least 15 frames per second. The camera was pointed straight down through an opening in the floor of the airplane. This permitted the entire survey area to be seen, unobstructed, at slightly forward and slightly backward angles (as the lens field of view is approximately 25°) in addition to being seen straight down. Analyzing the thermal signatures in multiple frames covering the entire field of view of the lens helps to differentiate deer from other objects and allows for a higher likelihood of identifying thermal signatures consistent with the presence of deer in and around large trees and in densely wooded areas.

Methods (cont'd):

Each sequence was analyzed frame-by-frame. Individual frames were thermally tuned and analyzed by a certified thermographer to identify thermal signatures consistent with the presence of deer. One hundred, fourteen (114) sequences were recorded and over 105,000 individual frames were analyzed in order to prepare this report.

Many different frames are analyzed when determining whether or not a particular thermal signature is caused by a deer. Furthermore, each frame was thermally tuned in many different ways to help differentiate a deer's signature from that of another object.

Adjacent sequences were analyzed to avoid duplicating deer counts in areas of overlap. Although deer could possibly move far enough in the time between flight lines to be mistaken for unique signatures, the likelihood of that happening is low. Deer are most active at dusk and dawn, and the scans were done well after sunset to decrease the chances for that type of error.

During the analysis, the infrared images were also compared side-by-side to "Google® Earth" imagery in order to identify natural and man-made features that may produce infrared readings that could be confused with wildlife. Items that could produce strong thermal signatures include natural items such as standing water, ice, rocks, tree trunks, and even certain types of vegetation. Man-made objects that can appear as thermal anomalies include sewer drains, electrical transformers, manhole covers, lights, and structures.

General Notes and Disclaimers:

As stated earlier, infrared scans are widely considered to be the most accurate method for counting deer. The accuracy of infrared surveys is most often quoted to be “85% or better” when done in ideal conditions.

This accuracy is accepted even though most infrared surveys only scan part of a site and then extrapolate the data to come up with the count. Although that method may yield results that are “close enough” for some purposes, Above All – Ohio does not extrapolate data from partial scans. We scan the entire site and count every thermal signature that we see that is consistent with the presence of deer. We also plot the locations as accurately as possible on Google Earth so as to get an idea of the distribution of the herds in addition to the population count.

In ideal or nearly ideal conditions, our method could potentially provide greater accuracy than the accepted norm, but we can never claim 100% accuracy in “real world” conditions. Some reasons for this are:

(1) Wildlife moves. As stated previously, deer are crepuscular animals and are most active around dusk and dawn. We generally start our surveys at least two hours after sunset to allow the deer time to become less active. Still, deer may be on the move at any time of the night and could conceivably cover enough ground be mistaken for a unique animal.

(2) The infrared scans do not actually show “deer” – they show thermal patterns and any anomaly in the pattern must be analyzed to determine whether it is likely caused by the presence of a deer or something else. Whether or not a particular thermal anomaly is a deer or something else is always a judgement call. The survey and analysis are performed utilizing high quality equipment and powerful analytical software. However, due to the limits of technology and the conditions unique to any given location within the site, the thermographer must rely on his or her background, knowledge of wildlife, knowledge of infrared science, and past experience to make the call as to whether or not a particular thermal signature resulted from the presence of a deer or not.

General Notes and Disclaimers (cont'd):

(3) Some anomalies may be due to the presence of other large mammals – horses, livestock, humans, or even smaller animals such as coyote (in some situations). For purposes of this survey, it was assumed that all signatures consistent with the presence of deer were, in fact, deer. If it is known that a particular part of the surveyed area is regularly used for livestock grazing (for example), please let me know so I can reevaluate the area(s).

(4) Our infrared scan was planned and performed to the best of our ability and knowledge with consideration to infrared science, thermography, wildlife biology, weather conditions, site geography and topography, and other conditions *at the time the work was completed*. However, this report can only be considered accurate for the dates and times of the scan. The results presented herein will be different from those of any other survey (infrared or otherwise) that may have been done in the past or may be done in the future.

Survey Details and Condition Analysis:

Geographic Data:

The areas surveyed were in Mahoning County, Ohio.

The areas surveyed were irregularly shaped but consisted of approximately 4,859 total acres within fifteen (15) distinct parks. The total area surveyed of approximately 8,908 acres includes a buffer zone around each park, roughly 300'–400' wide.

Site Conditions:

Several areas of the parks were very densely wooded. Even without leaves on the trees, thermal signatures of the deer can be masked by tree branches in densely wooded areas and very difficult to pick out. However, it is worth noting that in such heavily wooded areas, ground vegetation (food) is scarce, so deer are less likely to be present there anyway.

It was estimated that there was about 6" of snow cover in all scanned areas on both nights of the scan. It was also very cold on both nights – temperatures were 10°F and below – for the duration of the scans both nights. Winds were light and humidity levels were neither unusually high nor low.

My overall assessment is that the site physical conditions was very good and that the overall weather conditions were nearly ideal both nights. Data quality was excellent both nights. My overall assessment of the survey conditions was excellent.

Due to the previously mentioned factors, we can never guarantee total accuracy in any survey. However, I feel that these results are comfortably within the generally accepted "normal" accuracy range of 85%.

Celestial Data:

Dates and times of survey:

- (1) Approximately 8:45 PM EST January 21
to approximately 12:30 AM EST January 22
- (2) Approximately 8:40 PM EST January 26
to approximately 1:10 AM EST January 27

Sunset times:

- (1) Approximately 5:25 PM EST, January 21, 2022
- (2) Approximately 5:32 PM EST, January 26, 2022

Weather Data:

Sky condition during survey:

Clear in the vicinity of the surveyed area for the entire duration of the survey, both nights.

Temperature:

At or below 10°F for the entire duration of the survey, both nights.

Winds at time of scan:

Less than 10 mph for the entire duration of the survey, both nights.

Snow cover:

Approximately 6" at all locations, both nights.

My overall assessment of the suitability of the environmental conditions for an infrared wildlife survey is that the conditions were nearly ideal, both nights.

Review of Acquired Data:

Flight conditions were excellent during the scan with minimal wind and turbulence, both nights.

All equipment functioned as expected.

Due to variations in elevation across the site, lack of thermal contrast in some areas, and the very narrow depth of field of the infrared camera, some portions of the data were not optimally focused. However, data from all flight lines was usable.

Overlap of flight lines was good and consistent and there were no gaps in coverage noted. At the time of scan, a few flight lines appeared to be spaced farther apart than normal due to wind drift and/or human error causing the plane to be slightly off course. In these instances, additional flight lines were flown to ensure there would be no gaps in coverage.

Resolution of the imagery was calculated to be between 8" and 9" per pixel in most areas. This resolution is more than adequate to detect thermal anomalies caused by the presence of deer.

My overall assessment of the data quality is that it was excellent.

Infrared Scan Results and Discussion:

A total of 3,613 thermal infrared signatures with properties consistent with the presence of deer were identified within the fifteen (15) parks that were surveyed.

Of those signatures, 2,935 were within the various park boundaries as we were provided. The remaining 678 signatures were outside, but generally within 300'–400' of a park boundary. Animals observed within the buffer zone likely reside mainly within the parks. (Note that some signatures were a little farther away than 400', but no signature was included in the count if it was more than 500' away.)

It should be noted that if a thermal signature was within one park's surveyed area as well as within the buffer zone of an adjacent park, the signature was only counted once (for the park it was within).

Two sets of calculations are included with the report. The first set's calculations are based strictly on the number of signatures observed within the park boundaries. The second set includes the buffer zone in the area calculations and the additional signatures observed within the buffer zone.

The second set of data which includes signatures in the buffer zone is likely to be the more accurate representation of the "true" density of the population.

On the strict counts, numbers will be skewed when the park area is small and the buffer zone adds considerable acreage (percentage-wise) to the scanned area (for example, Cranberry Run, and Egypt Swamp) or the park has irregular boundaries (such as Mill Creek). The numbers can be drastically skewed when both of these conditions exist (such as Yellow Creek).

The deer densities on the whole were much higher than I have personally seen in the past. Densities around 100–150 deer per square mile are more common than the 200–300 and even higher densities observed here.

Infrared Scan Results and Discussion (cont'd):

Because the densities observed were much higher than I expected, extra time was taken to review the data. Many signatures were spot checked and given a second look to see if there may be some other explanation for the anomaly. In other cases, entire flight lines were re-analyzed from scratch and compared to the original analysis.

After evaluating the environmental and site conditions, data quality, and performing the self-imposed crosscheck of the analysis, I have a high degree of confidence that our results are at least 85% accurate and are likely to be even more accurate.

The high densities of deer may be the result of such things as minimal or no population control efforts or culling programs in place for extended periods of time; habitat that can support a large herd of deer; lack of natural predators; and, in the case of the central area parks at least, an inability of the deer to migrate out of the area as their population grows. (The parks in the central area are surrounded by residential and commercial development leaving no easy way for the animals to migrate out of the area.)

High population densities can cause serious problems such as property damage in the form of automobile accidents; health issues such as malnourished deer becoming sick; and/or safety issues such as deer becoming aggressive as they compete for food. They can also cause problems that are merely a nuisance such as feeding off of and/or destroying residents' landscaping and decorative plants in order to survive.

Note that determining any specific problems due to overpopulation, determining the overall health of the herd, determining the health of the ecosystem of the parks, or making recommendations for controlling the deer population or correcting any perceived or identified problem is beyond my area of expertise and beyond the scope this report.

Infrared Scan Results and Discussion (cont'd):

It is therefore highly recommended to review the results of this survey with wildlife management experts and personnel that are familiar with the specific parks and the deer population therein before making any decisions regarding further action.

If there are any questions regarding the data, this report, or the survey in general, please do not hesitate to contact me.

List of files and images included in report:

- (1) Count Summary showing number of thermal signatures identified on a per-park basis as well as some calculations on density and habitat.
- (2) Count Ranges (based on estimated accuracy) and additional density/habitat calculations.
- (3) Aerial photo maps showing the location of observed thermal signatures consistent with the presence of deer (aerial images used are Copyright Google® Earth) in each park.
- (4) Sample infrared imagery showing thermal anomalies consistent with the presence of deer.

Additional file delivered:

Mill Creek MetroParks 2022 Deer Survey – Final.kmz: This file is a "Google® Earth" KMZ file showing the park boundaries as provided, the approximate survey area for each park (purple outlines), and the approximate observed locations of infrared signatures consistent with the presence of deer. This file can be opened and viewed within Google® Earth.

Each marker on the result maps and included in the KMZ file indicates the number of signatures detected at each location. The observed location of the signatures is at the pointed end of the marker. For groups of deer, the pointed end of the marker was placed approximately in the middle of the group.

In some areas, the markers could be placed very accurately. However, in heavily wooded areas or areas that have little or no distinguishing land features, the placement accuracy may be lower.

A marker with "no name" indicates that the signature was observed inside the park boundary. A marker named "x" means that it was observed outside the park, but within the buffer zone. A marker named "xx" means it was outside the park and more than 500' away from a boundary. Markers named "xx" were NOT included in any park's count.

Side note: The marker description (such as "151-617-325-240") is only used internally during the analysis of the data. It is in, in effect, a serial number for that particular signature which allows us to quickly find it in the infrared data sequences if needed for further review. If there are two serial numbers in the description, the signature was observed in the overlap area of adjacent flight lines and deemed to be the same thermal signature or set of signatures.

Deer Count Summary - All Parks

				Thermal Signatures Observed within Park Boundaries								Thermal Signatures Observed within Park Boundaries plus Signatures within ~300-400' buffer				Ratio of Surveyed Area to Park Size	
				Park	Park Size (acres)	Park size (sq miles)	Count	Acres per Deer	Deer per Acre	Deer per Sq Mile	Acres Surveyed	Sq Miles Surveyed	Count	Acres per Deer	Deer per Acre	Deer per Sq Mile	
Central	Mill Creek Park			1,626	2.54	903	1.80	0.56	355	3,491	5.45	1,034	3.38	0.30	190	2.15	
	Hitchcock Woods			689	1.08	429	1.61	0.62	398	1,010	1.58	497	2.03	0.49	315	1.47	
	Huntington Woods			383	0.60	354	1.08	0.92	592	571	0.89	361	1.58	0.63	405	1.49	
	Mill Creek Wildlife Sanctuary			482	0.75	267	1.81	0.55	355	712	1.11	342	2.08	0.48	307	1.48	
	Collier Preserve			303	0.47	124	2.44	0.41	262	450	0.70	151	2.98	0.34	215	1.49	
East	McGuffey Wildlife Preserve			78	0.12	48	1.63	0.62	394	152	0.24	70	2.17	0.46	295	1.95	
	Yellow Creek			76	0.12	80	0.95	1.05	674	274	0.43	119	2.30	0.43	278	3.61	
	Springfield Forest			89	0.14	69	1.29	0.78	496	207	0.32	87	2.38	0.42	269	2.33	
	Cranberry Run Headwaters			27	0.04	19	1.42	0.70	450	89	0.14	26	3.42	0.29	187	3.30	
West	Vickers Nature Preserve			262	0.41	116	2.26	0.44	283	411	0.64	184	2.23	0.45	287	1.57	
	Sebring Woods			39	0.06	37	1.05	0.95	607	87	0.14	49	1.78	0.56	360	2.23	
	Egypt Swamp Preserve			75	0.12	54	1.39	0.72	461	247	0.39	102	2.42	0.41	264	3.29	
	Sawmill Creek			167	0.26	141	1.18	0.84	540	265	0.41	214	1.24	0.81	517	1.59	
	MetroParks Farm			402	0.63	197	2.04	0.49	314	654	1.02	243	2.69	0.37	238	1.63	
	Hawkins Marsh			161	0.25	97	1.66	0.60	386	288	0.45	134	2.15	0.47	298	1.79	
Totals and Averages:				4,859	7.59	2,935	1.66	0.60	387	8,908	13.92	3,613	2.47	0.41	260	1.83	

Deer Count Ranges by Park - CENTRAL

(estimated accuracy of survey: 85%)

Mill Creek Park

Park Area (1,626 acres)			
	Low	Count	High
Count:	768	903	1,038
Acres per deer:	2.12	1.80	1.57
Deer per square mile:	302	355	409

Surveyed Area (3,491 acres)			
	Low	Count	High
Count:	879	1,034	1,189
Acres per deer:	3.97	3.38	2.94
Deer per square mile:	161	190	218

Hitchcock Woods

Park Area (689 acres)			
	Low	Count	High
Count:	365	429	493
Acres per deer:	1.89	1.61	1.40
Deer per square mile:	339	398	458

Surveyed Area (1,010 acres)			
	Low	Count	High
Count:	422	497	572
Acres per deer:	2.39	2.03	1.77
Deer per square mile:	268	315	362

Huntington Woods

Park Area (383 acres)			
	Low	Count	High
Count:	301	354	407
Acres per deer:	1.27	1.08	0.94
Deer per square mile:	503	592	680

Surveyed Area (571 acres)			
	Low	Count	High
Count:	307	361	415
Acres per deer:	1.86	1.58	1.38
Deer per square mile:	344	405	465

Mill Creek Wildlife Sanctuary

Park Area (482 acres)			
	Low	Count	High
Count:	227	267	307
Acres per deer:	2.12	1.81	1.57
Deer per square mile:	301	355	408

Surveyed Area (712 acres)			
	Low	Count	High
Count:	291	342	393
Acres per deer:	2.45	2.08	1.81
Deer per square mile:	261	307	354

Collier Preserve

Park Area (303 acres)			
	Low	Count	High
Count:	105	124	143
Acres per deer:	2.87	2.44	2.12
Deer per square mile:	223	262	301

Surveyed Area (450 acres)			
	Low	Count	High
Count:	128	151	174
Acres per deer:	3.51	2.98	2.59
Deer per square mile:	183	215	247

Deer Count Ranges by Park - EAST

(estimated accuracy of survey: 85%)

McGuffey Wildlife Preserve

Park Area (78 acres)

	Low	Count	High
Count:	41	48	55
Acres per deer:	1.91	1.63	1.41
Deer per square mile:	335	394	453

Surveyed Area (152 acres)

	Low	Count	High
Count:	60	70	81
Acres per deer:	2.55	2.17	1.89
Deer per square mile:	251	295	339

Yellow Creek

Park Area (76 acres)

	Low	Count	High
Count:	68	80	92
Acres per deer:	1.12	0.95	0.83
Deer per square mile:	573	674	775

Surveyed Area (274 acres)

	Low	Count	High
Count:	101	119	137
Acres per deer:	2.71	2.30	2.00
Deer per square mile:	236	278	320

Springfield Forest

Park Area (89 acres)

	Low	Count	High
Count:	59	69	79
Acres per deer:	1.52	1.29	1.12
Deer per square mile:	422	496	571

Surveyed Area (207 acres)

	Low	Count	High
Count:	74	87	100
Acres per deer:	2.80	2.38	2.07
Deer per square mile:	229	269	309

Cranberry Run Headwaters

Park Area (27 acres)

	Low	Count	High
Count:	16	19	22
Acres per deer:	1.67	1.42	1.24
Deer per square mile:	383	450	518

Surveyed Area (89 acres)

	Low	Count	High
Count:	22	26	30
Acres per deer:	4.03	3.42	2.98
Deer per square mile:	159	187	215

Deer Count Ranges by Park - WEST

(estimated accuracy of survey: 85%)

Vickers Nature Preserve

Park Area (262 acres)			
	Low	Count	High
Count:	99	116	133
Acres per deer:	2.66	2.26	1.96
Deer per square mile:	241	283	326

Surveyed Area (411 acres)			
	Low	Count	High
Count:	156	184	212
Acres per deer:	2.63	2.23	1.94
Deer per square mile:	244	287	329

Sebring Woods

Park Area (39 acres)			
	Low	Count	High
Count:	31	37	43
Acres per deer:	1.24	1.05	0.92
Deer per square mile:	516	607	698

Surveyed Area (87 acres)			
	Low	Count	High
Count:	42	49	56
Acres per deer:	2.09	1.78	1.54
Deer per square mile:	306	360	415

Egypt Swamp Preserve

Park Area (75 acres)			
	Low	Count	High
Count:	46	54	62
Acres per deer:	1.63	1.39	1.21
Deer per square mile:	392	461	530

Surveyed Area (247 acres)			
	Low	Count	High
Count:	87	102	117
Acres per deer:	2.85	2.42	2.11
Deer per square mile:	225	264	304

Sawmill Creek

Park Area (167 acres)			
	Low	Count	High
Count:	120	141	162
Acres per deer:	1.39	1.18	1.03
Deer per square mile:	459	540	621

Surveyed Area (265 acres)			
	Low	Count	High
Count:	182	214	246
Acres per deer:	1.46	1.24	1.08
Deer per square mile:	439	517	594

Metro Parks Farm

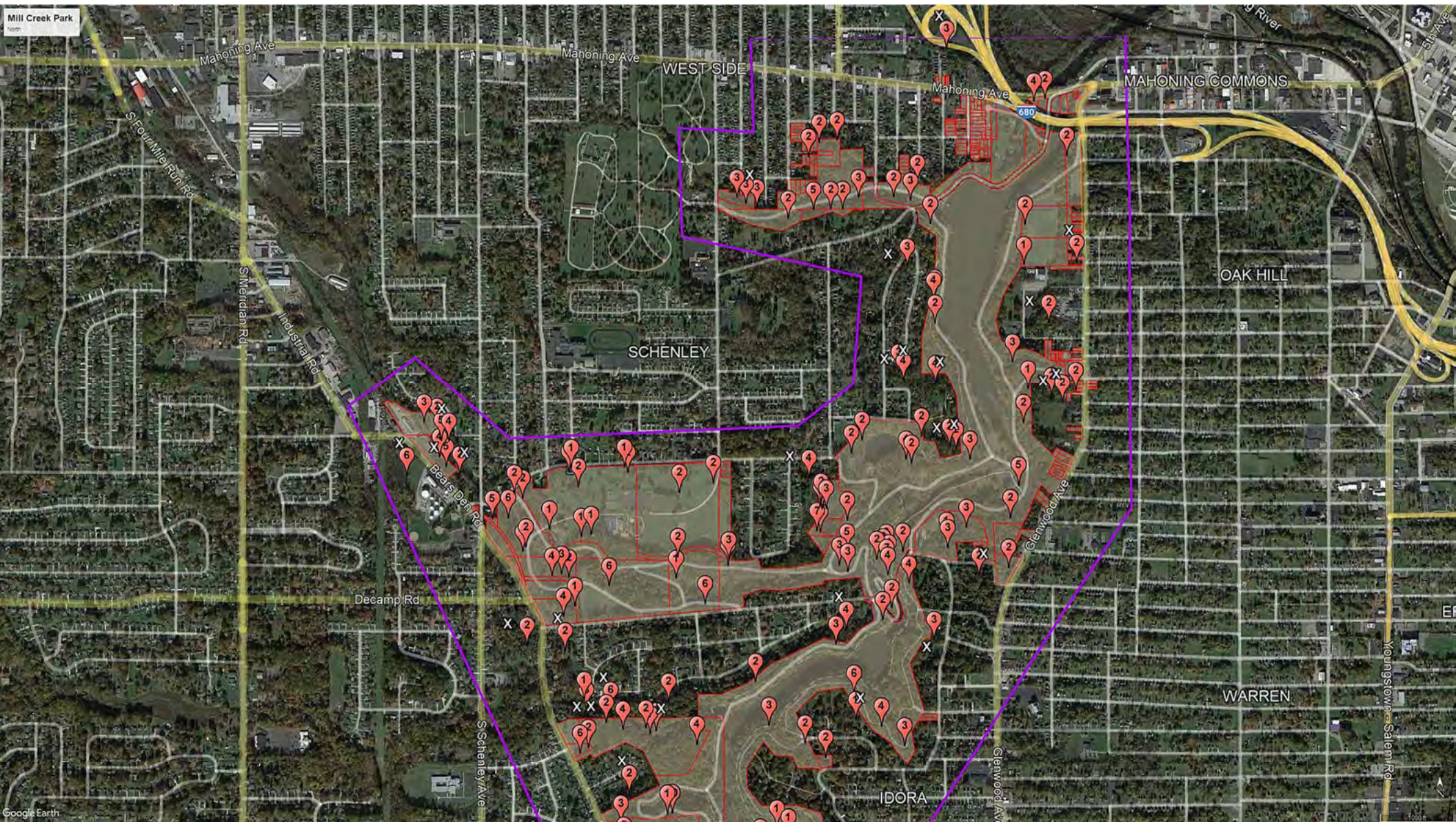
Park Area (402 acres)			
	Low	Count	High
Count:	167	197	227
Acres per deer:	2.40	2.04	1.77
Deer per square mile:	267	314	361

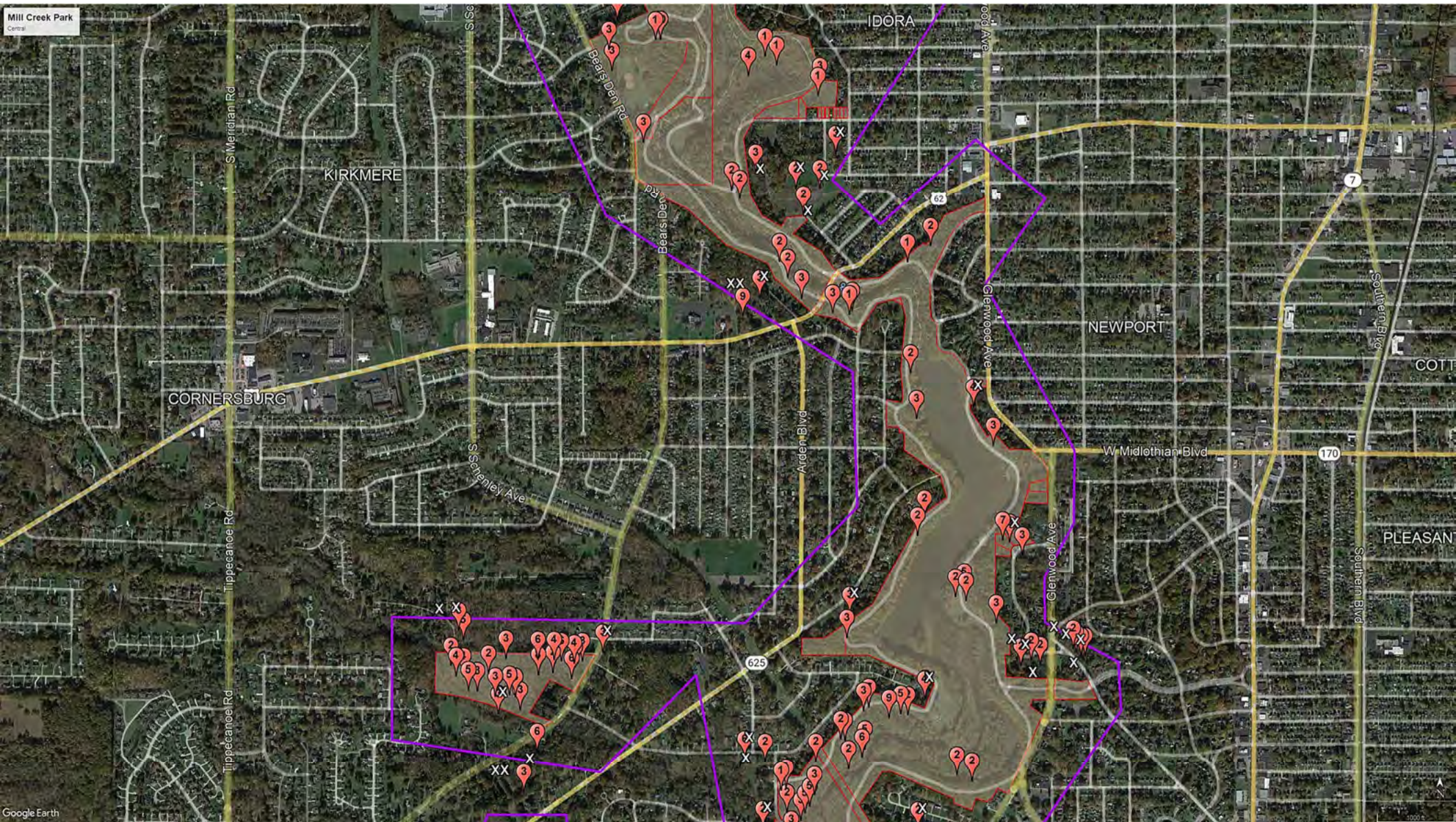
Surveyed Area (654 acres)			
	Low	Count	High
Count:	207	243	279
Acres per deer:	3.17	2.69	2.34
Deer per square mile:	202	238	273

Hawkins Marsh

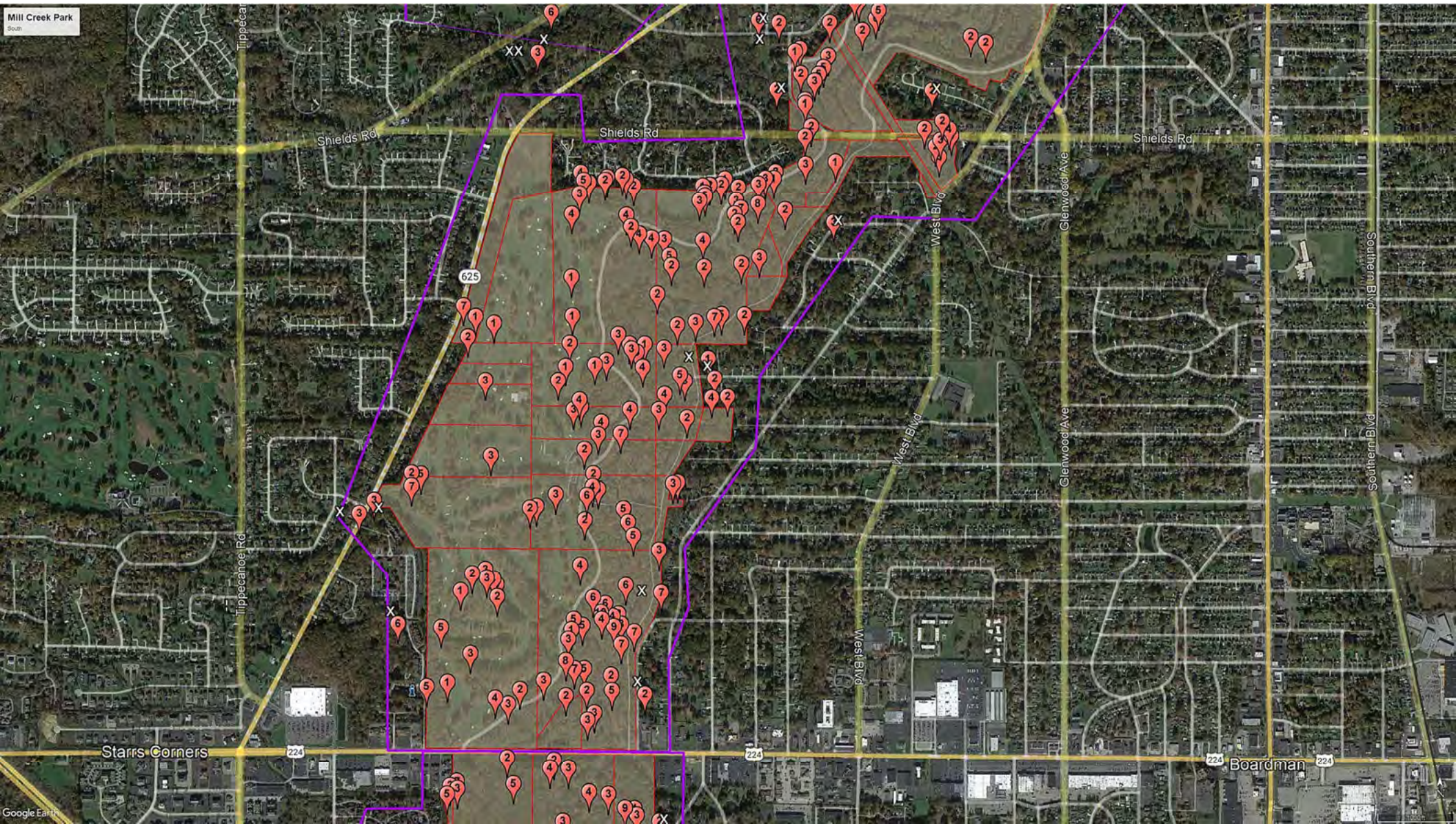
Park Area (161 acres)			
	Low	Count	High
Count:	82	97	112
Acres per deer:	1.95	1.66	1.44
Deer per square mile:	328	386	443

Surveyed Area (288 acres)			
	Low	Count	High
Count:	114	134	154
Acres per deer:	2.53	2.15	1.87
Deer per square mile:	253	298	342

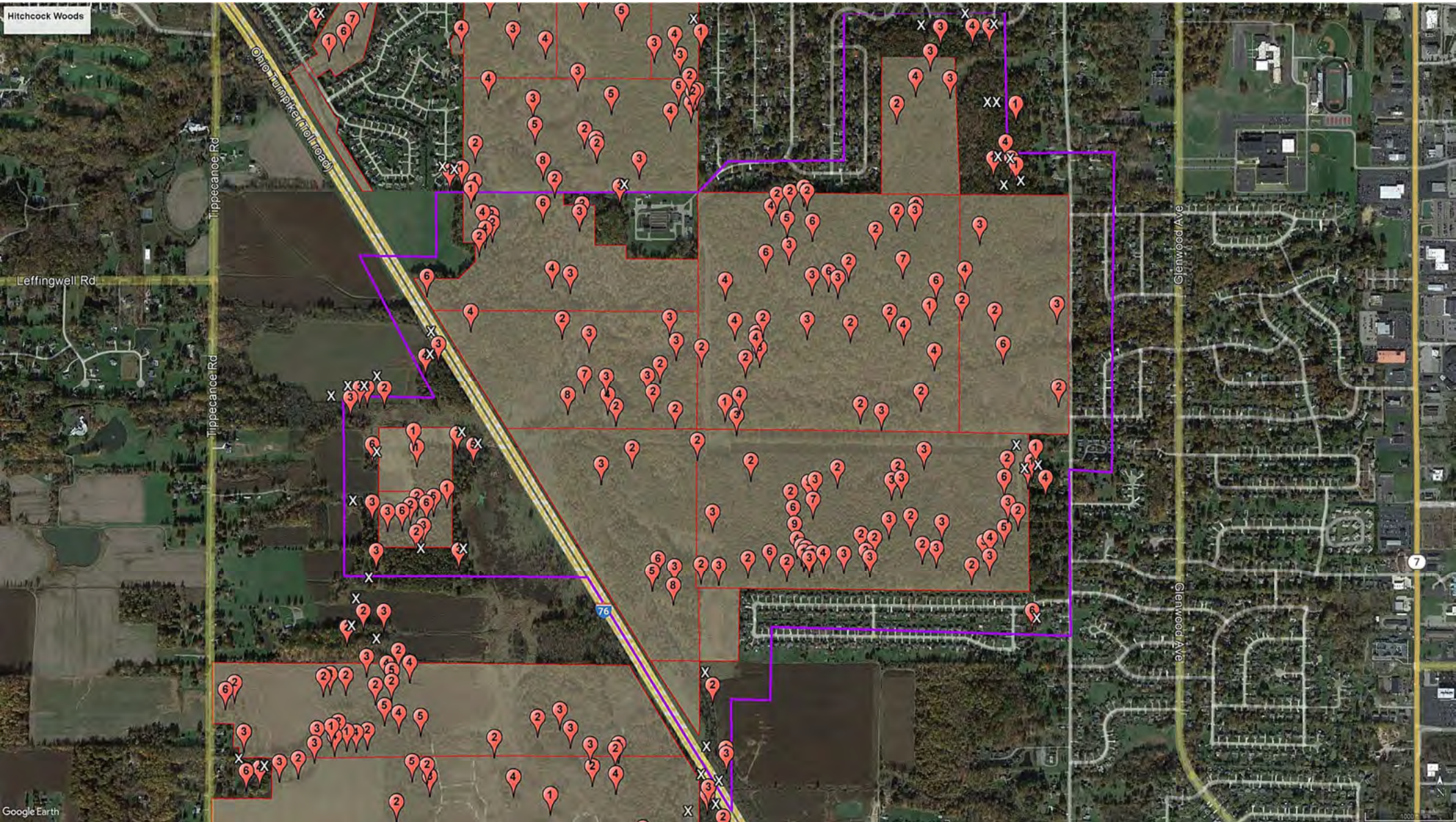


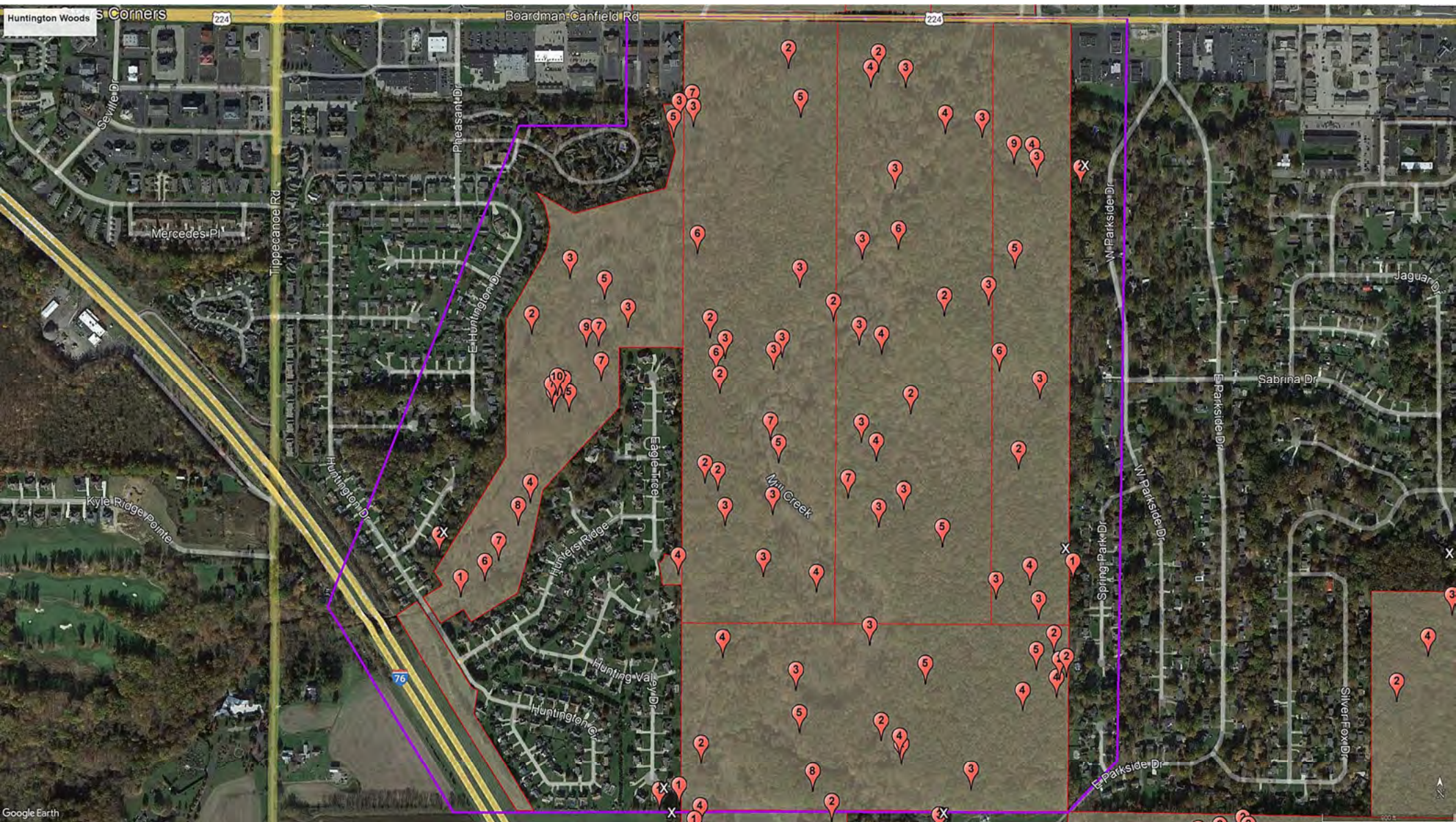


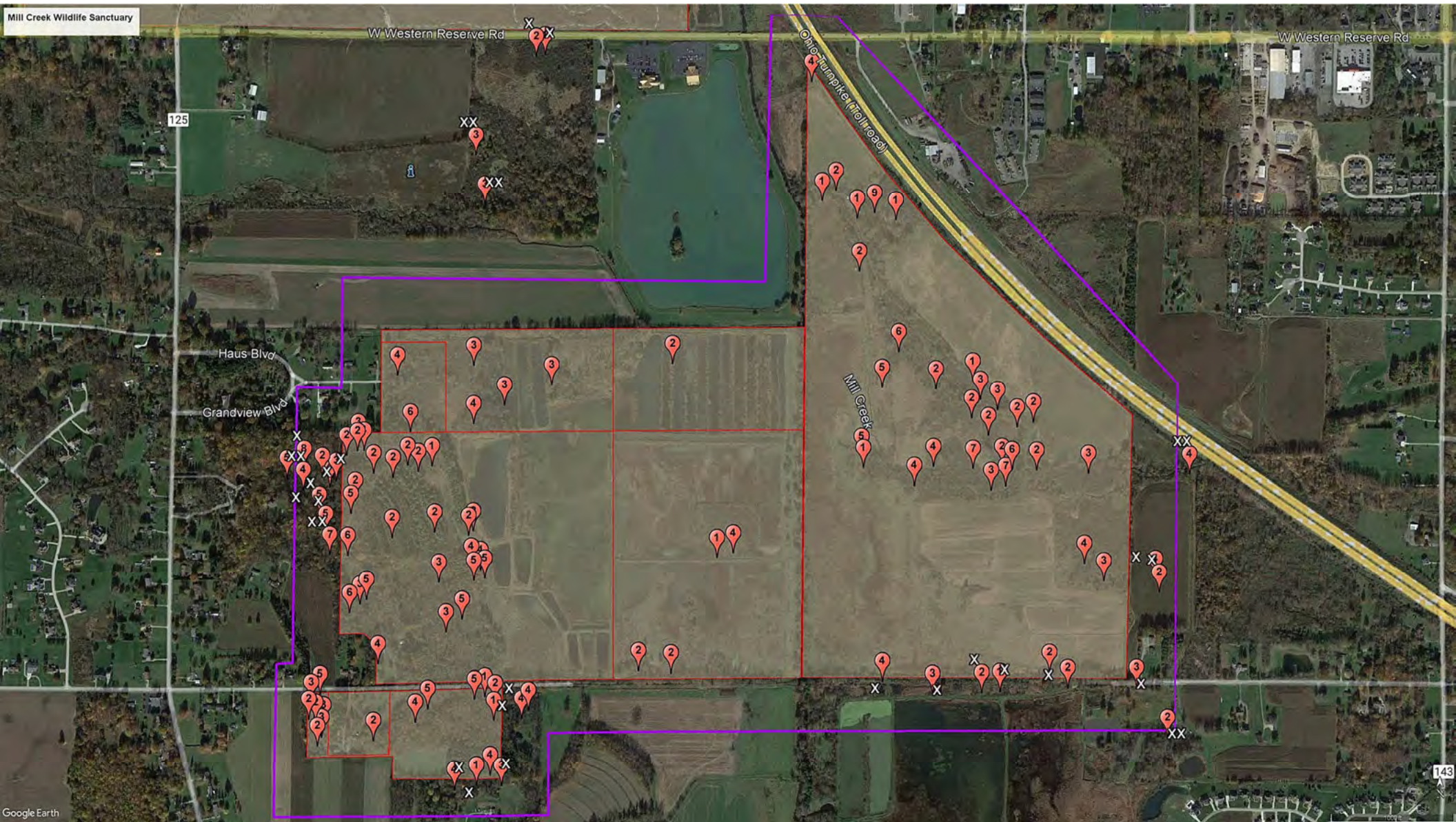
Mill Creek Park
South



Hitchcock Woods

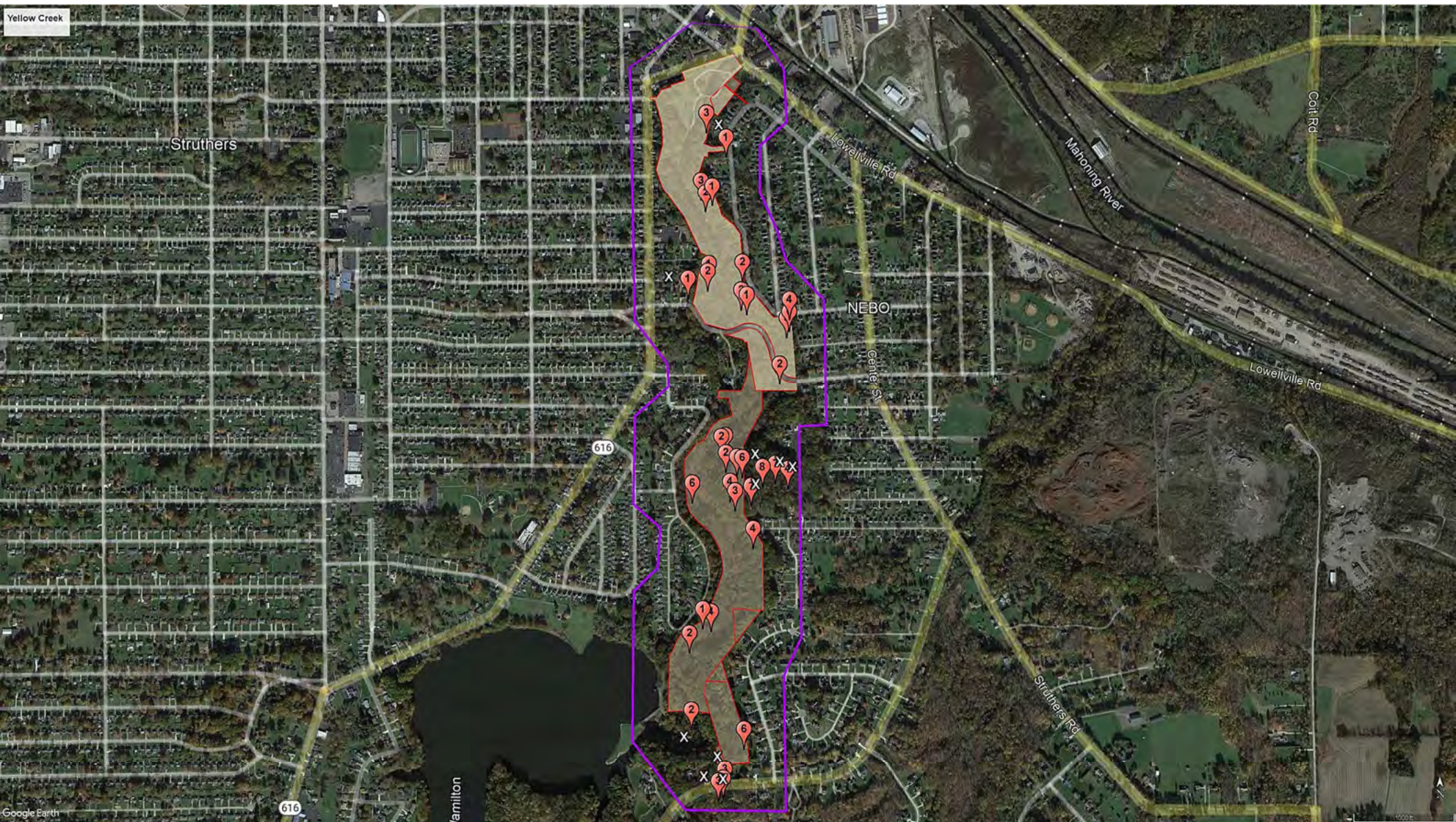








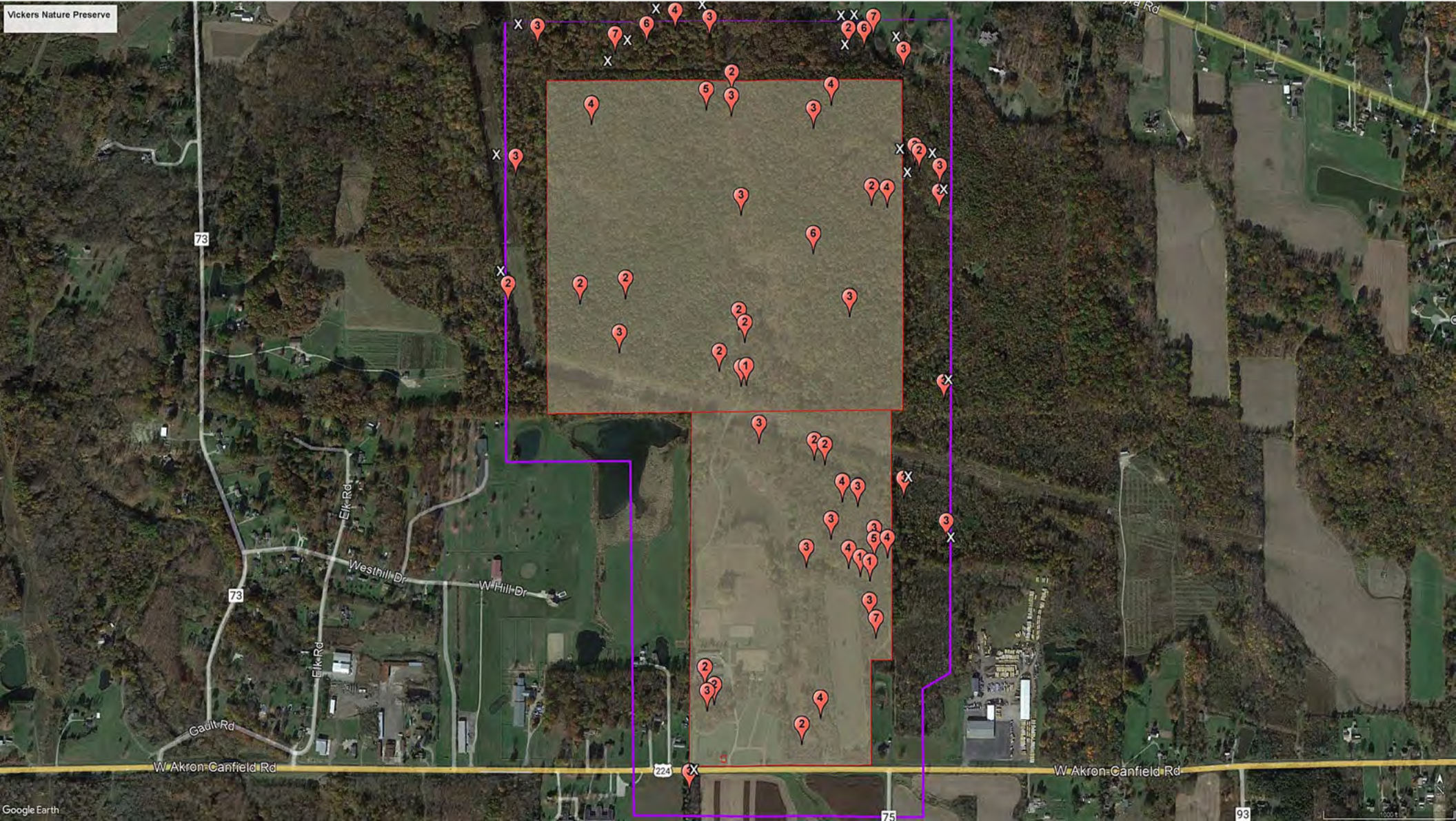






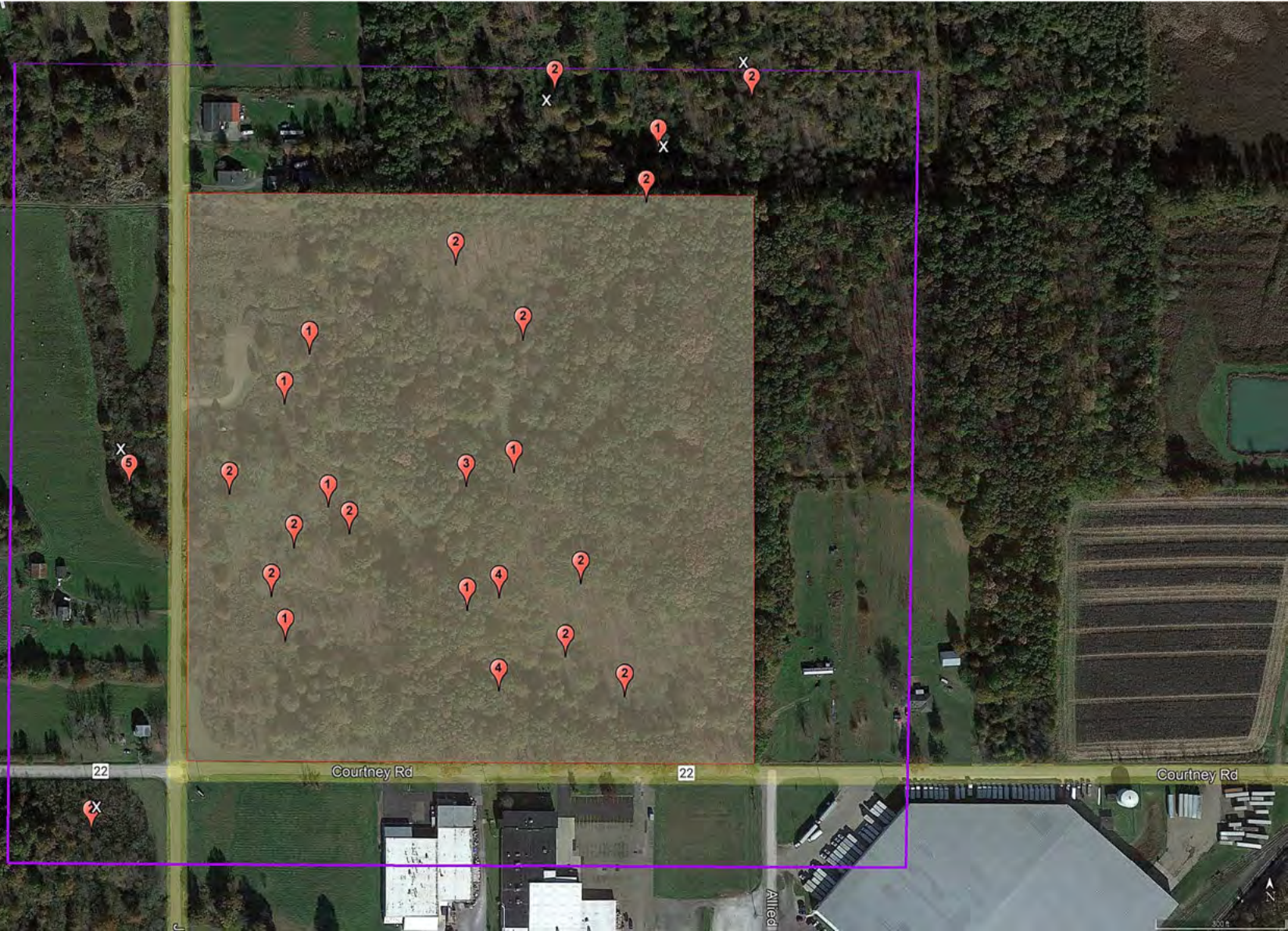


Vickers Nature Preserve

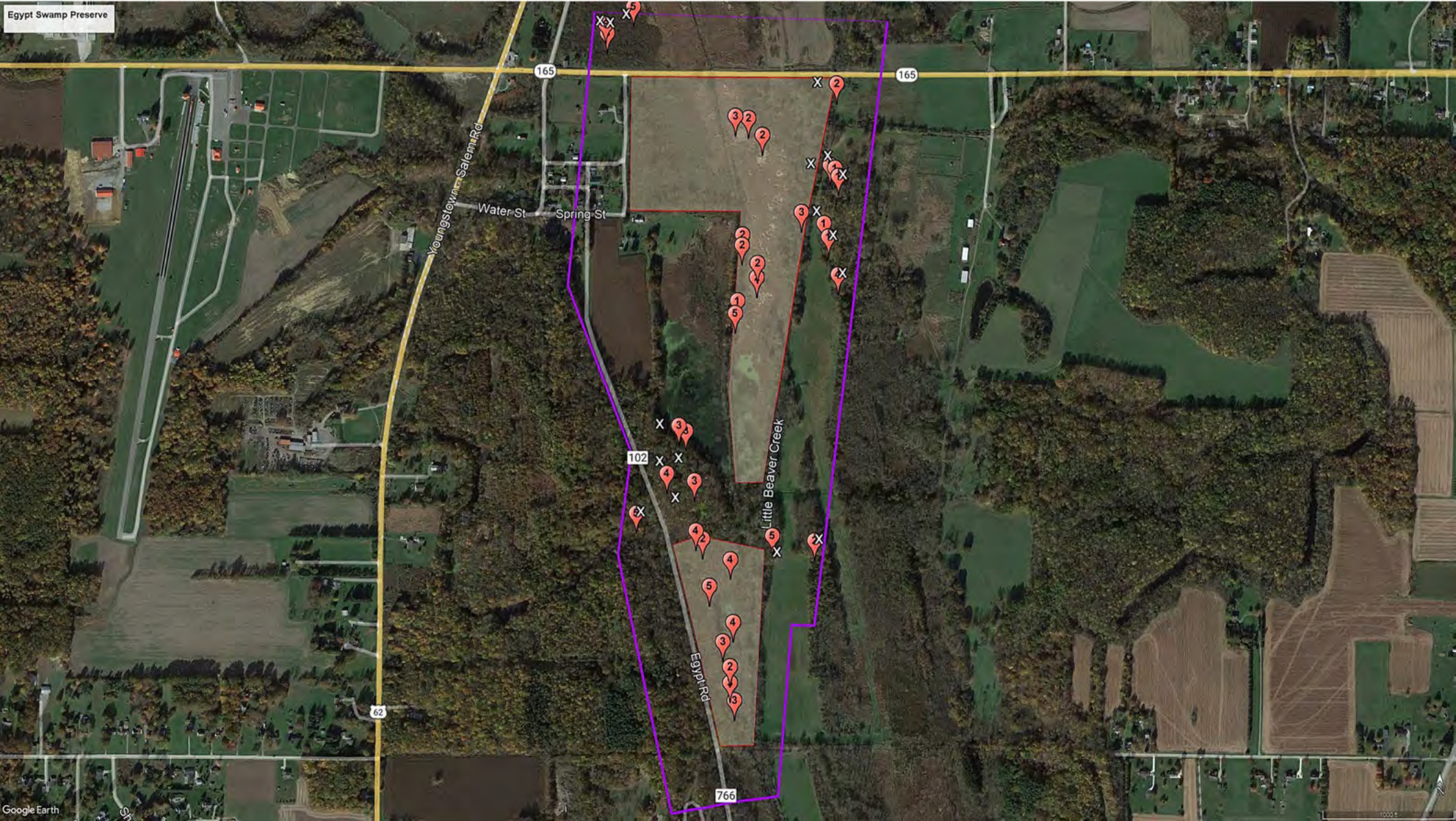


Sebring Woods

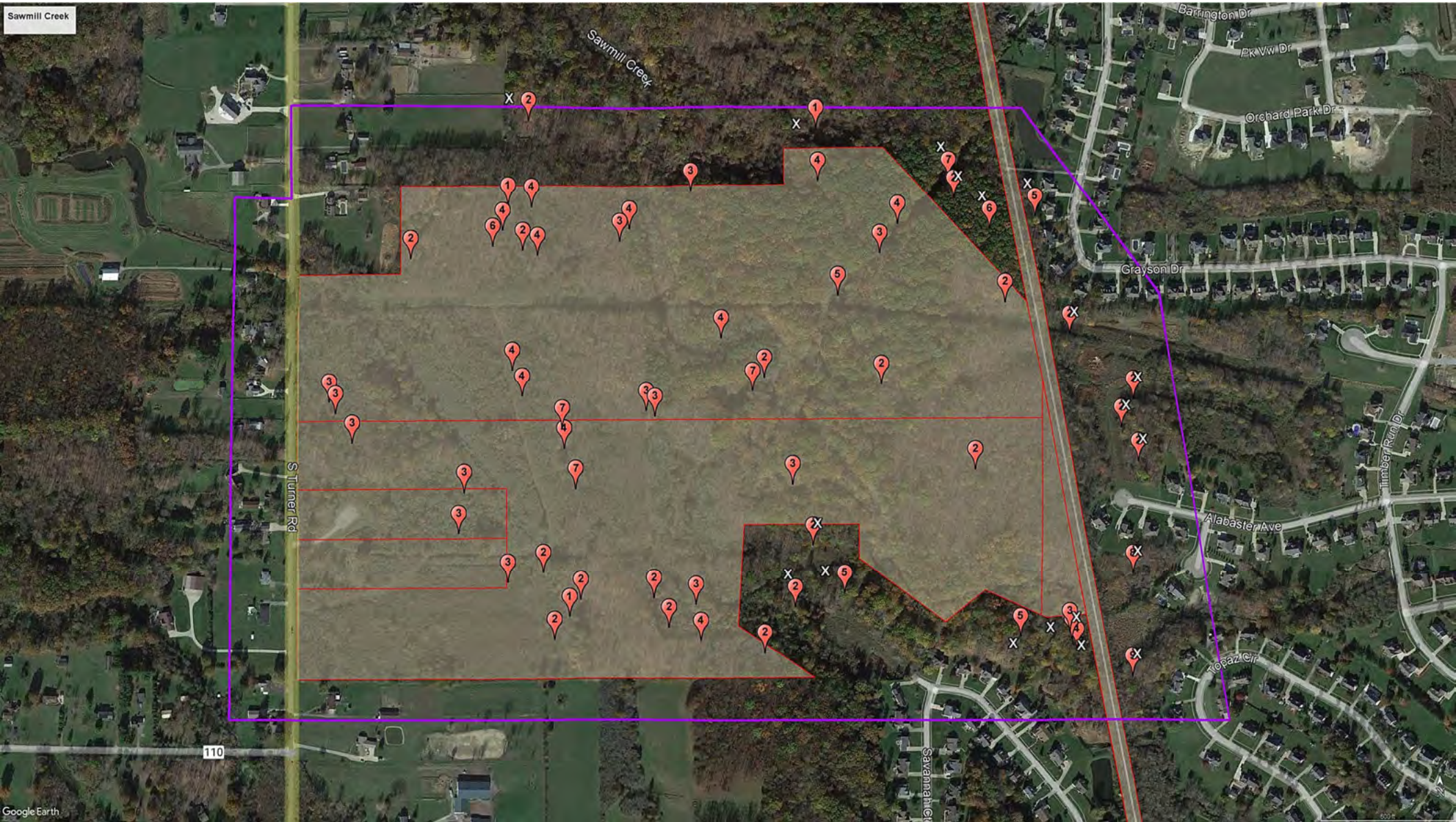
Google Earth



Egypt Swamp Preserve



Sawmill Creek





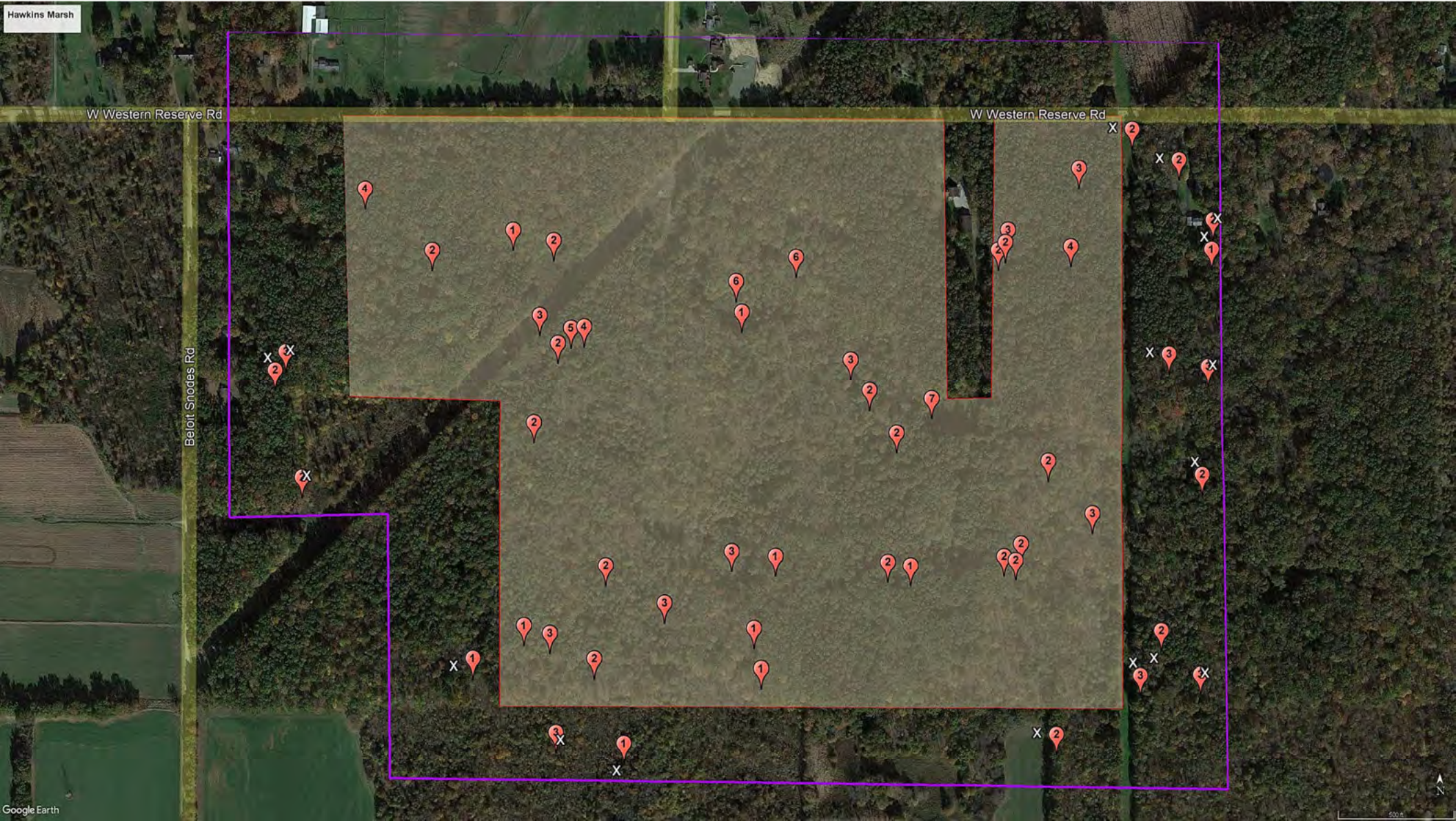
Hawkins Marsh

W Western Reserve Rd

W Western Reserve Rd

Beloit Shodes Rd

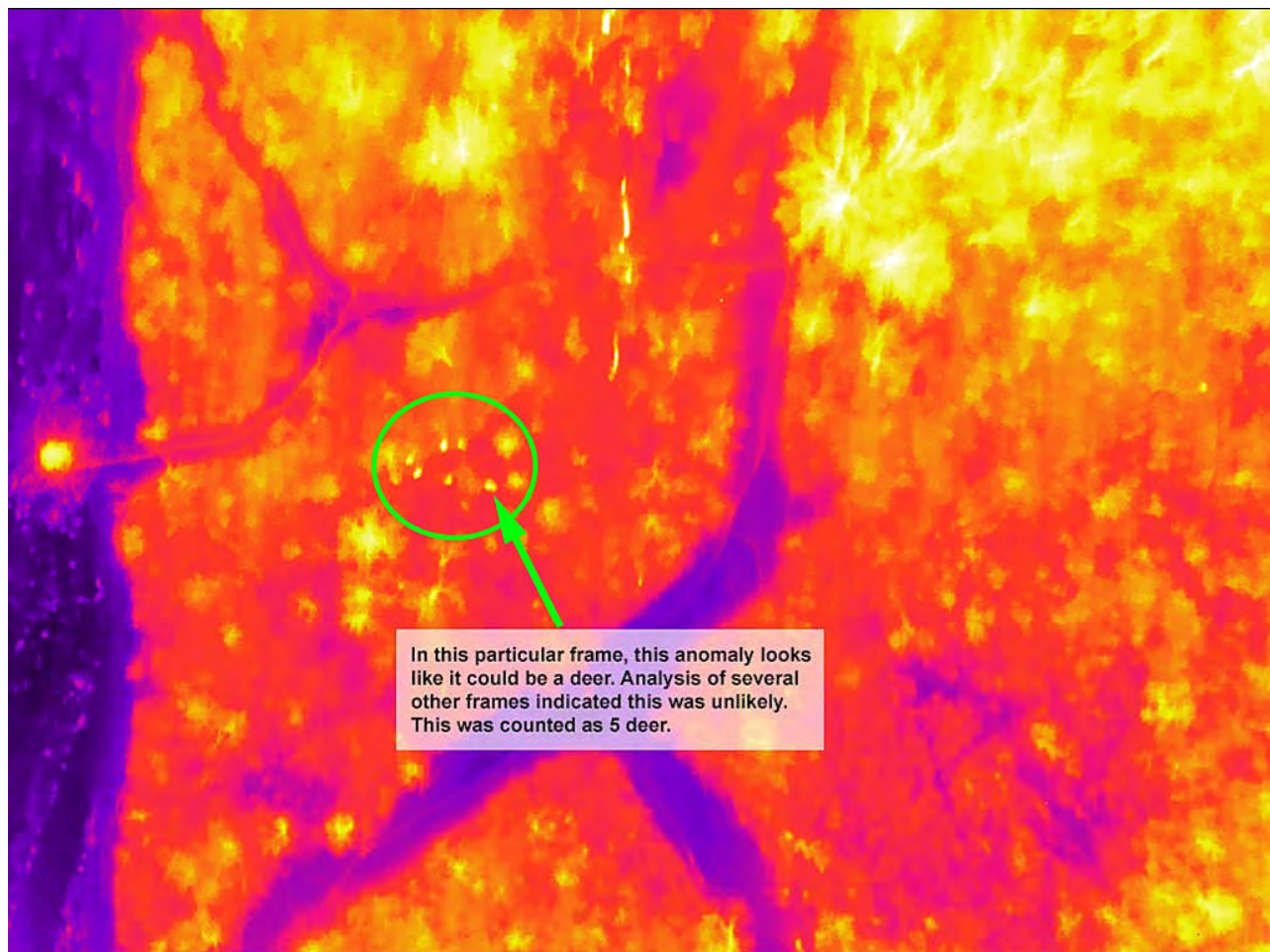
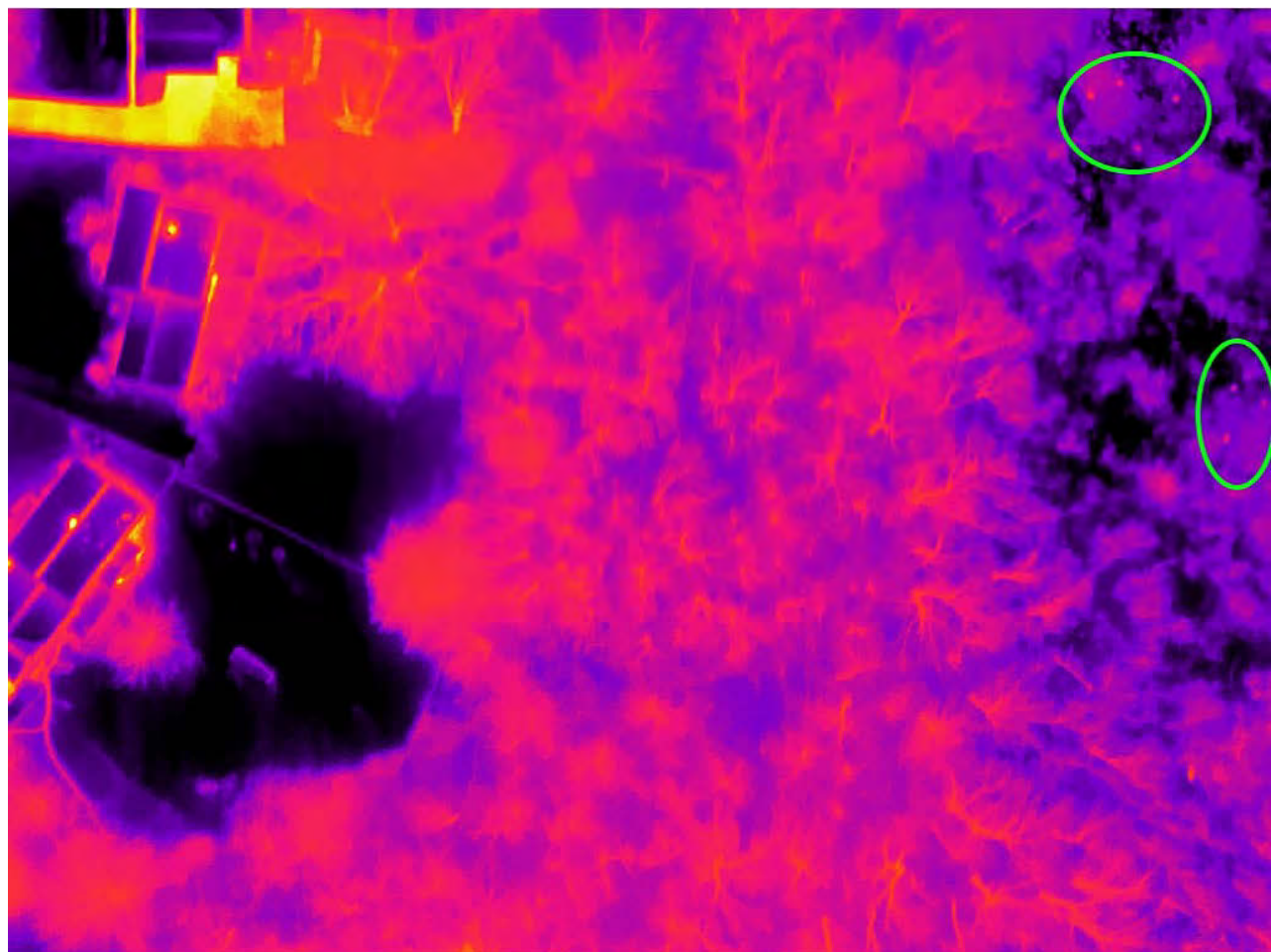
Google Earth

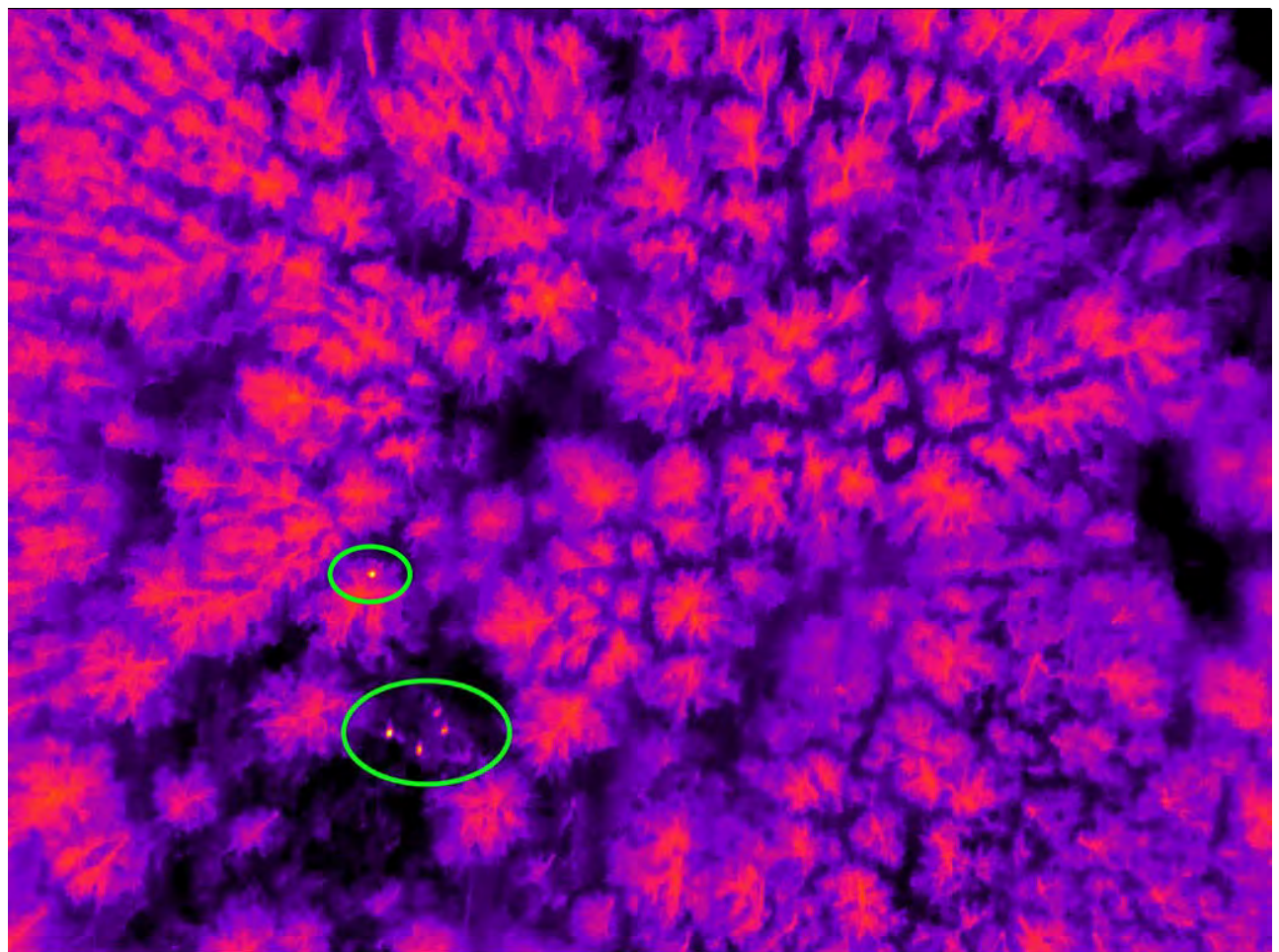
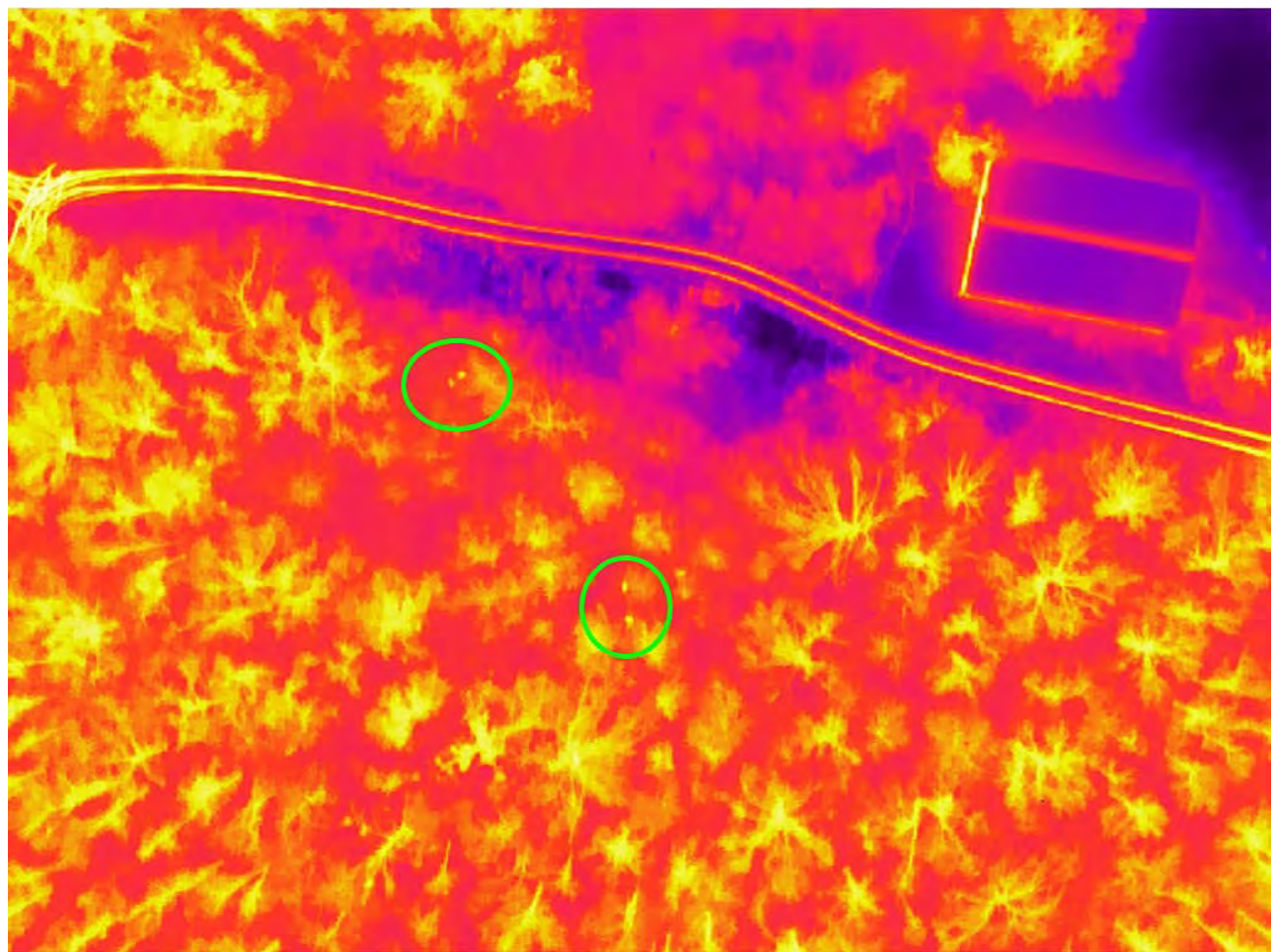


The following pages are some examples of the infrared imagery obtained. It is important to understand that determining whether any “dot” in the image is a deer or something else, many frames are analyzed and many different temperature spans are applied to the frames.

It should also be noted that anomalies can be much more easily seen in video form. It is very difficult to separate “candidate signatures” in static images.

The following images represent some of the more readily identifiable signatures in static form and even then, they may be difficult to interpret by the average viewer.





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Certification:

The infrared survey was completed to the best of my ability utilizing one of the latest FLIR infrared cameras under conditions that were acceptable for this application. Acquired images were analyzed using the latest version of the “FLIR Tools+” and FLIR’s ExaminIR software.

I, a Certified Level II Thermographer, attest that I performed the scan, analyzed the acquired images, and prepared the reports. When and if necessary, I consulted with a Certified Level III Thermographer regarding any anomalies that I was not comfortable with diagnosing myself.

Please feel free to contact me with any questions you may have regarding this report or any of the conclusions found in it.

This report was prepared by:

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Mike Holthouse", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Mike Holthouse, Certified Level II Thermographer
Above All Aerial & Specialty Photography – Ohio

White-tailed Deer Population Densities - 2022 Trail Camera Surveys

Mill Creek MetroParks

Mahoning County, Ohio

Introduction

The White-tailed Deer (*Odocoileus virginianus*) is a member of the Cervidae family (alongside Elk, Moose, Mule Deer, etc.) and serves as a keystone herbivore throughout its native range which primarily includes eastern North America. White-tailed deer have proven to be extremely adaptable, as their populations have risen exponentially since the late 20th century despite increased habitat fragmentation caused by human development. As the population of white-tailed deer on the landscape rises and the amount of available habitat is reduced, a definitive increase in negative impacts associated with the overabundance of deer has become apparent over the last several decades. While these effects can be felt across all landscapes, they are often disproportionally concentrated in urban/suburban areas including parks and municipalities.

To better understand the size and health of the deer herd located on MetroParks properties and to gauge the effectiveness of trail camera surveys for estimating population densities of white-tailed deer, Mill Creek MetroParks staff initiated survey efforts at Hitchcock Woods and the Mill Creek Wildlife Sanctuary, beginning in late July 2022.

Materials and Methods

The survey methodology discussed below was based upon the guidelines provided by researchers at the Mississippi State University Deer Ecology and Management Lab and the National Deer Association.

Site Selection

Camera locations were chosen based upon known areas of deer activity, ease of access for maintenance, and to be evenly distributed throughout the facility. Based upon available research, each camera site is based upon a 100-acre survey area.

Survey Duration

After site selection, each location was pre-baited with shelled corn (~25# per camera) for a period of seven (7) days beginning on 7/11 and concluding on 7/18 – sites were rebaited three (3) times per week on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays. Photographs were taken and reviewed during the pre-baiting period to ensure proper camera placement, however, the data from this seven (7) day period was not used in the final count.

Following the pre-baiting period, the survey period was initiated and continued for fourteen (14) consecutive days beginning on 7/18 and concluding on 8/1. During this time cameras were rebaited three (3) times per week on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays (~25# per camera).

Data Collection and Review

The trail cameras were programmed to take pictures 24-hours per day but would only trigger once every five (5) minutes taking one photo at a time – each photo was time and date stamped.

During the survey period, SD cards were collected from each camera site once per week (7/25 and 8/1 respectively) and the data was reviewed and categorized. Photos were separated into four (4) categories: unique bucks, total bucks, total does, and total fawns and the data from the two-week survey period was combined into the final results.

Results

Data was analyzed using the guidelines provided by the MSU Deer Lab and the National Deer Association (NDA). This methodology is based upon the number of known unique bucks photographed compared to the total number of buck pictures taken – dividing these two numbers gives you a “population factor” that can then be used to estimate the number of unique does and fawns based upon the total number of photos taken.

The data for each survey site can be seen in the figures below:

Mill Creek Wildlife Sanctuary

NDA's Trail-Camera Survey Computation Form

Year: 2022

Survey Dates: From: 7/18 To: 8/1

Property: MCWS

Acres: 300

Bucks (unique): 9

Bucks (total): 142

Does (total): 584

Fawns (total): 94

Pop. Factor: $9 \div 142 = 0.063$

Does: $584 \times 0.063 = 36.80$

Fawns: $94 \times 0.063 = 5.92$

Adjusted Population Estimates:

Bucks: $9 \times 1.11 = 9.99$

Does: $36.80 \times 1.11 = 40.85$

Fawns: $5.92 \times 1.11 = 6.57$

Carry Down to Additional Formulas

Does per Buck: $40.85 \div 9.99 = 4.08$

Fawns per Doe: $6.57 \div 40.85 = 0.16$

Acres Surveyed: 300

Total Pop: 57.41

Acres/Deer: $300 \div 57.41 = 5.23$

Deers/Square Mile: $57.41 \times 640 = 36742 \div 300 = 122$

NATIONAL DEER ASSOCIATION
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Hitchcock Woods

NDA's Trail-Camera Survey Computation Form

Year: 2022

Survey Dates: From: 7/18 To: 8/1

Property: Hitchcock Woods

Acres: 300

Bucks (unique): 14

Bucks (total): 262

Does (total): 1447

Fawns (total): 130

Pop. Factor: $14 \div 262 = 0.053$

Does: $1447 \times 0.053 = 76.69$

Fawns: $130 \times 0.053 = 6.89$

Adjusted Population Estimates:

Bucks: $14 \times 1.11 = 15.54$

Does: $76.69 \times 1.11 = 85.13$

Fawns: $6.89 \times 1.11 = 7.65$

Carry Down to Additional Formulas

Does per Buck: $85.13 \div 15.54 = 5.48$

Fawns per Doe: $7.65 \div 85.13 = 0.09$

Acres Surveyed: 300

Total Pop: 108.32

Acres/Deer: $300 \div 108.32 = 2.77$

Deers/Square Mile: $108.32 \times 640 = 69325 \div 300 = 231$

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Discussion

The recommended population density of white-tailed deer is 10-20 per square mile, populations greater than often exceed the ecological carrying capacity of the landscape and can cause significant damage to native flora due to overbrowsing. With the population estimate in both study areas greatly exceeding the recommended range of 10-20 deer per square mile both properties are at a very serious risk of long-term ecological damage associated with overbrowsing. Such damage is already readily apparent within both areas, but most notably at Hitchcock Woods.

It was observed that many of the deer photographed at Hitchcock Woods appeared to be emaciated and in poor physical condition, this coupled with the very apparent browse damage witnessed onsite suggests that the population of white-tailed deer at this facility has not only exceeded the ecological carrying capacity of the land but also may be approaching biological carrying capacity. Biological carrying capacity is the population level in which a species can persist on the landscape in a sustainable fashion based upon available resources (food, water, shelter).

Overall, it was determined that utilizing the survey methodology provided by MSU and NDA was a cost effective and accurate way to monitor populations of white-tailed deer utilizing MetroParks property. It is recommended that the MetroParks continue to utilize trail camera surveys using this methodology to better understand populations densities of white-tailed deer throughout the park system and how deer are impacting the ecosystem.

Notes

This survey effort should be considered a minimum population density at each facility and should only be considered accurate at the time of survey. Deer movements and their utilization of any given property will change throughout the season and year to year depending upon available resources (food, water, shelter).

Many of the pictures collected were of raccoons, waterfowl, songbirds, and other wildlife – the subsequent 5-minute delay likely resulted in some deer not being photographed if they passed through while the camera was inactive. With that being said, the methodology provided by MSU and NDA accounts for this possibility and it is assumed that ~80% of the deer within a 100-acre study zone will be photographed over a 14-day survey window.

Additional Resources

Conducting Camera Surveys to Estimate Population Characteristics of White-tailed Deer
<http://extension.msstate.edu/sites/default/files/publications/p2788.pdf>

United States Department of Agriculture
Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service
Wildlife Services

**Summary of the White-tailed Deer Count in the Mill Creek
MetroParks, Mill Creek Park
8 March 2021**

Submitted by:
USDA APHIS Wildlife Services
6100 Columbus Avenue
Sandusky, Ohio 44870
(419) 625-9093



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The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS), Wildlife Services (WS) was requested to conduct a count of white-tailed deer (*Odocoileus virginianus*) within Mill Creek MetroParks, Mill Creek Park property. The objective of the count was to provide the MetroParks with an index of the deer population.

Study Area

Mill Creek Park is situated between State Route 224 and Interstate 680 in northeast Mahoning County. Mill Creek Park is approximately 2.4 square miles of green space surrounded by developed areas. The Mill Creek flows through the park supplying water to three lakes. Mill Creek Park is comprised of multiple hike and bike trails, natural terrain hiking trails as well as multiple outdoor recreation areas. In addition, there are two golf courses located within Mill Creek Park.

Methods

Wildlife Services utilized two observers with handheld thermal imagers to identify and count deer while driving a pre-determined route. The route was created to cover as much of the park as possible and to minimize the possibility of counting deer more than once (Figure 1). The number of deer observed as well as their approximate locations were recorded on a map of the park.

Results

The deer count occurred on 8 March 2021 between 18:30 and 21:30. A total of 39 deer were observed. An underlying assumption for many survey techniques designed to estimate deer abundance is that deer are evenly distributed across the landscape. To that end, WS used Arc GIS to approximate the total area of the park that was observed from the survey route with the thermal imaging equipment. It is estimated that 83% of the available area in the park was included in the count. Wildlife Services concludes that this count yields a range estimate of 39-47 deer within the Mill Creek Park at the time this count was conducted.

Deer observations were distributed throughout the park with 59% (n=22) occurring south of State Route 62 and 41% (n=17) located north of State Route 62. Of the 22 deer observations south of State Route 62, six occurred on or adjacent to the Mill Creek Park golf course. The remaining 16 observations occurred within proximity to residential properties. Of the 17 deer observations north of state route 62, 24% (n=4) occurred within proximity to surrounding residential properties. The remaining 11 observations 76% (n=13) of observations occurred in natural habitats within the park. Portions of the survey route included areas outside of Mill Creek Park boundaries to increase access and because of road closures within the park. No deer were counted outside of the park boundary. Figure 2 below contains a summary of the number and location of deer observed in Mill Creek Park during the WS deer count.

Discussion

The composition of roads and drivable hike and bike trails within Mill Creek Park, combined with the size of the park, were favorable to conducting a ground count for white-tailed deer using thermal imagers. In addition, weather conditions during the survey were favorable for deer movement. Deer were observed to be on their feet and actively feeding throughout the duration of the count. Deer that are active are more likely to be observed.

The results of any deer survey/counting method should be viewed as a snapshot of the deer population during the timeframe the survey was completed. White-tailed deer populations can fluctuate temporally and seasonally. Potential reasons for these fluctuations include deer movement because of weather, food availability or preference, the breeding season and as a result of human pressures (i.e. hunting).

Recommendations

White-tailed deer population estimates/counts should be interpreted in context with other quantifiable measures of deer damage such as, annual browse surveys, vegetation plots, deer exclosure plots, etc. These indices may be used to identify specific geographical areas within Park that support higher than recommended numbers of deer or deer that may pose an elevated threat to natural resources.

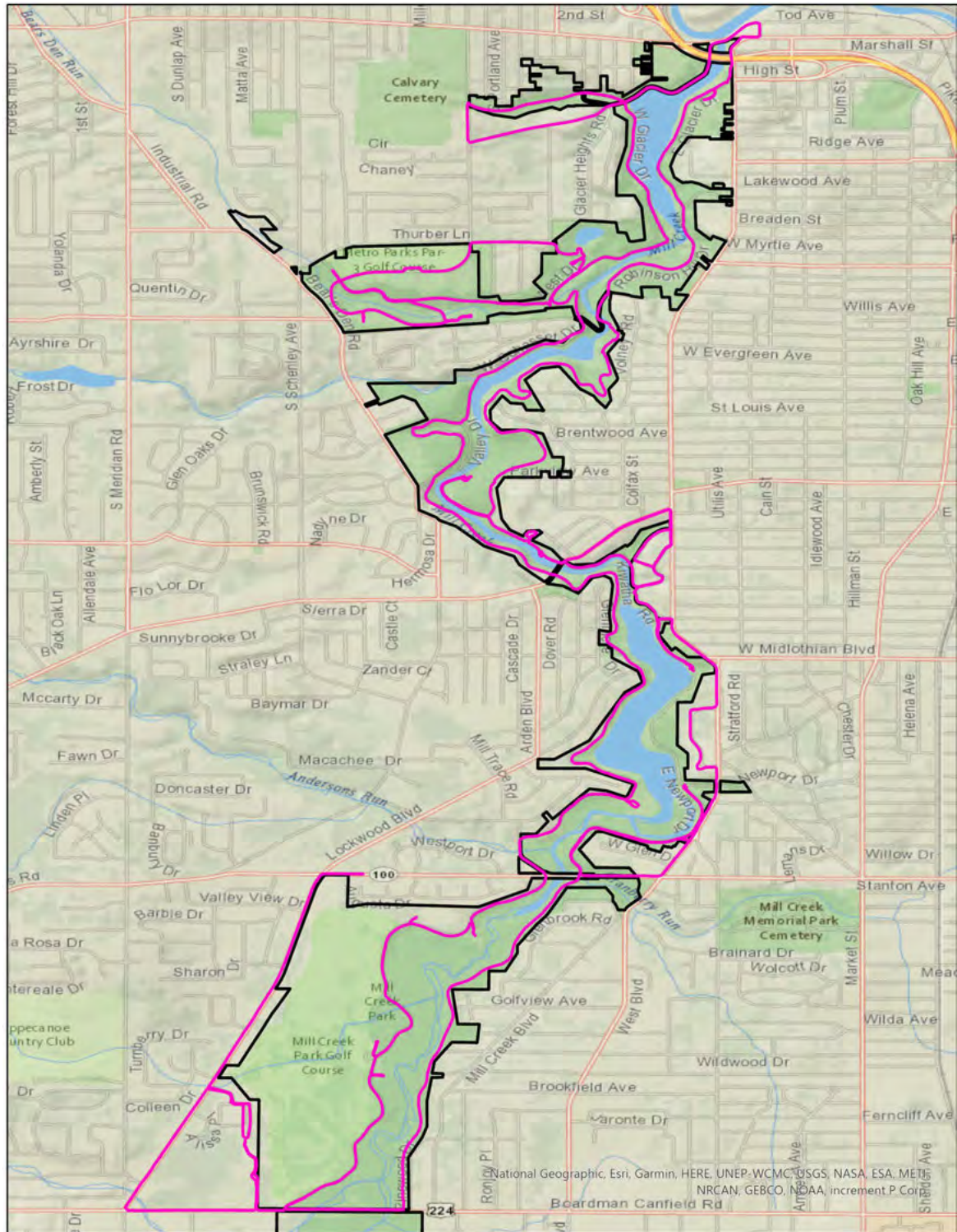


Figure 1. A map showing the route (pink) in Mill Creek Park, Ohio that was used to conduct the white-tailed deer count on 8 March 2021.

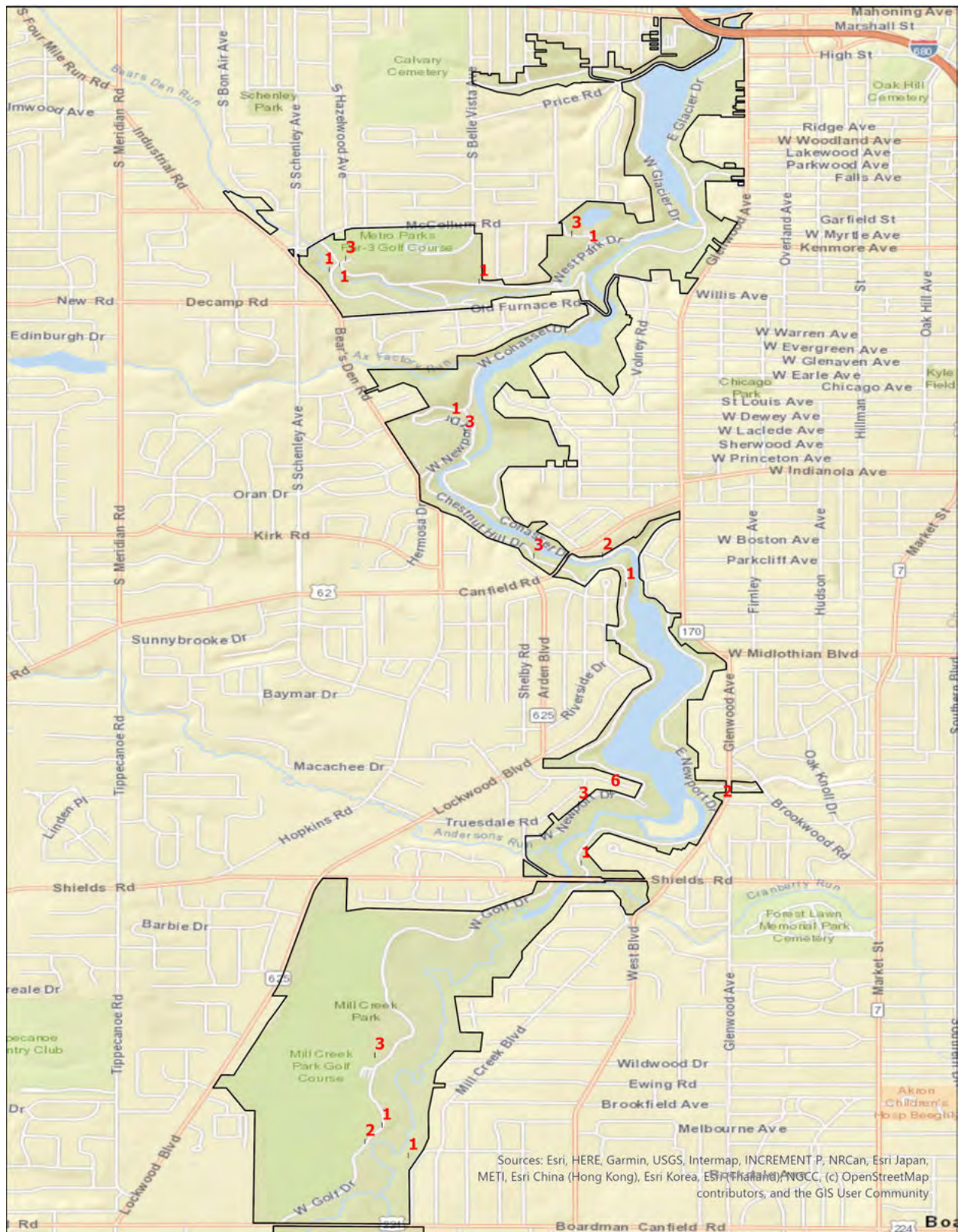


Figure 2. A map depicting the approximate location and number of white-tailed deer observed during the 8 March 2021 count in Mill Creek Park, Ohio.

United States Department of Agriculture
Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service
Wildlife Services

**Summary of the White-tailed Deer Count in the Mill Creek
MetroParks, Mill Creek Park
15 March 2022**

Submitted by:
USDA APHIS Wildlife Services
6100 Columbus Avenue
Sandusky, Ohio 44870
(419) 625-9093



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The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS), Wildlife Services (WS) was requested to conduct a count of white-tailed deer (*Odocoileus virginianus*) within Mill Creek MetroParks, Mill Creek Park property. The objective of the count was to provide the MetroParks with an index of the deer population.

Study Area

Mill Creek Park is situated between state route 224 and interstate 680 in northeast Mahoning County. Mill Creek Park is approximately 2.4 square miles in of green space surrounded by heavily developed areas. The Mill Creek flows through the park supplying water to three lakes. Mill Creek Park is comprised of multiple hike and bike trails, natural terrain hiking trails as well as multiple outdoor recreation areas. In addition, there are two golf courses located within Mill Creek Park.

Methods

Wildlife Services utilized two observers with handheld thermal imagers to identify and count deer as we drove a pre-determined route. The route was created to cover as much of the Park as possible and to minimize the possibility of counting deer more than once (Figure 1). The number of deer observed as well as their approximate locations were recorded on a map of the Park.

Results

The deer count occurred on 15 March 2022 between 19:30 and 21:30. A total of 61 deer were observed. An underlying assumption for many survey techniques designed to estimate deer abundance is that deer are evenly distributed across the landscape. To that end, WS used Arc GIS to approximate the total area of the Park that was observed from the route with the thermal imaging equipment. It is estimated that 83% of the available area in the Park was included in the count. Wildlife Services concludes that this count yields a minimum estimate of 61-73 deer within the Mill Creek Park at the time this count was conducted.

Deer observations were evenly distributed throughout the park with 53% (n=32) of the total south of state route 62 and 47% (n=29) north of state route 62. Of the 32 deer observations south of state route 62, 16 occurred on or adjacent to the Mill Creek Park golf course. The remaining 16 observations occurred within proximity to residential properties. Of the 29 deer observations north of state route 62, 69% (n=20) occurred within proximity to residential properties. The remaining nine observations (31%) occurred in natural habitats. Portions of the survey went outside of Mill Creek Park boundaries due to access points into the park. Eleven deer were counted outside of the park boundary. These observations occurred no more than 150 yards from the park boundaries. Figure 2 below contains a summary of the number and location of deer observed in Mill Creek Park during the WS deer count.

Discussion

The composition of roads and drivable hike and bike trails within Mill Creek Park, combined with the size of the park, were conducive to conducting a ground count for white-tailed deer

using thermal imagers. In addition, weather conditions during the survey were favorable for deer movement. Deer were observed to be on their feet and actively feeding throughout the duration of the count. Deer that are active are more likely to be observed.

The results of any deer survey/counting method should be viewed as a snapshot of the deer population during the timeframe the survey was completed. White-tailed deer populations can fluctuate temporally and seasonally. Potential reasons for these fluctuations include deer movement because of weather, food availability/preference, the breeding season and as a result of human pressures (i.e. hunting).

Recommendations

White-tailed deer population estimates/counts should be interpreted in context with other quantifiable measures of deer damage such as, annual browse surveys, vegetation plots, deer exclosures, etc. These indices may be used to identify specific geographical areas within Park that support higher than recommended numbers of deer or deer that may pose an elevated threat to natural resources.

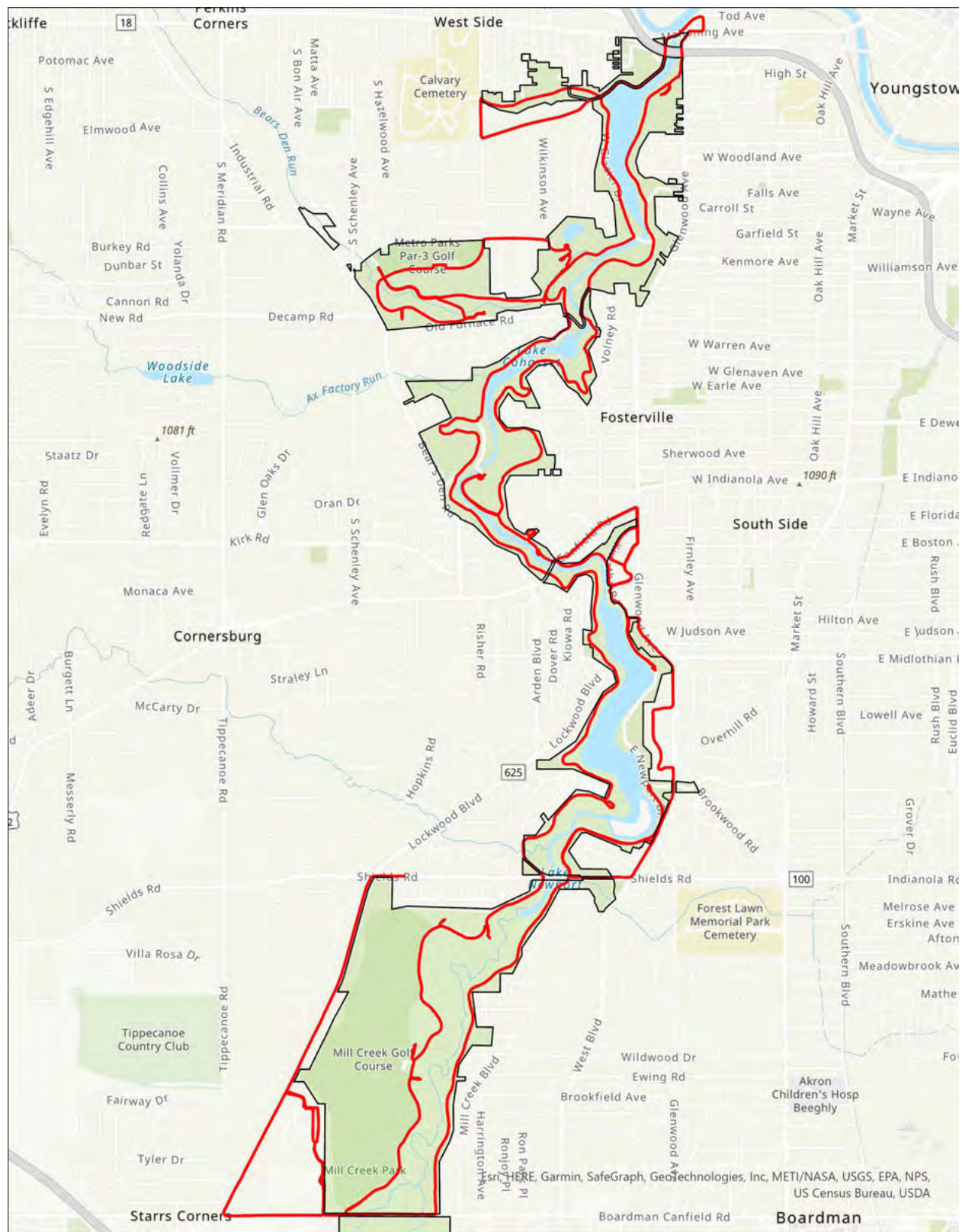
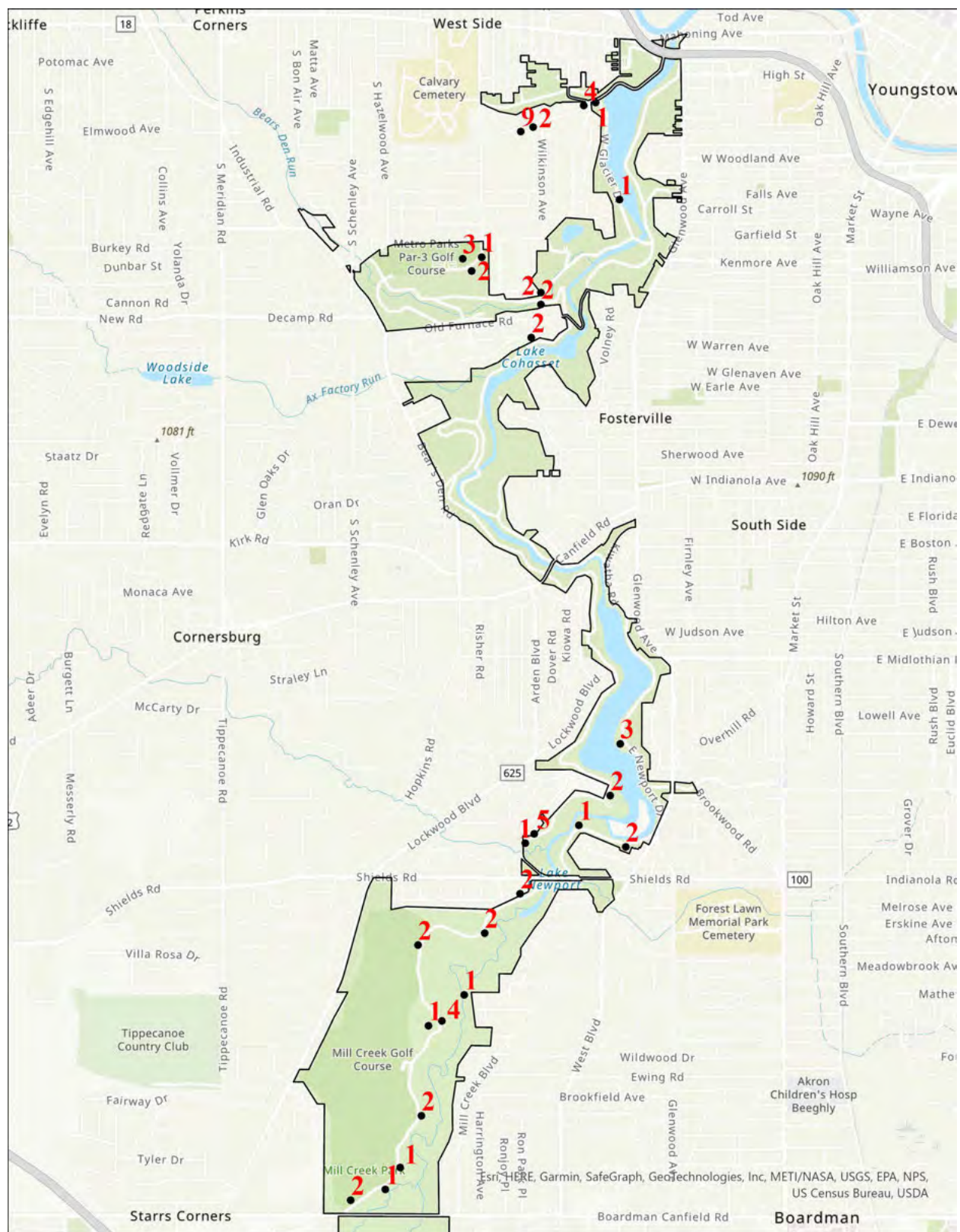


Figure 1. A map showing the route (red) in Mill Creek Park, Ohio that was used to conduct the white-tailed deer count on 15 March 2022.



Aerial Infrared Deer Count Report

Mill Creek MetroPark

10 March 2000

The Mill Creek MetroPark (Canfield, OH) was the subject of an aerial infrared (IR) deer count flight on the night of 7 February 2000. The IR imaging conditions were good, with a clear sky and light winds from the north. The surface temperature was 14 degrees Fahrenheit.

The report package includes this written report, edited VHS videotape of the count area (previously delivered), map printouts of the deer count and dispersion within and near the count area and a copy of each map in .tif and .jpeg formats on CD-ROM.

Results:

METROPARK	DATE	<u>DEER</u>			
		Inside/Possible	//	Outside/Possible	// Domestic
Mill Creek	~1660 Ac	7 Feb 00	255 / 34+	//	42 / 0 // N/A

Analysis Notes

Mill Creek MetroPark

The Mill Creek MetroPark is located in Canfield, Ohio. The 1660 acre park straddles US Highway 224 (W. Canfield Poland Road). The park is principally deciduous woods with a golf course north of the highway. The deer thermal signatures were generally well contrasting with the background and I estimate the count to be 80 to 90% accurate. This accuracy number is subjective, based on conditions during the flight and my experience with other counts under varying circumstances, as well as the level of difficulty in analyzing the infrared imagery during post-processing. There were a number of distractions to accurate deer counting, however, such as snow cover with deer scratchings and deer bedding down areas. These feeding and bedding marks are typically the size of a deer and are closely grouped. The feeding marks are usually in open ground, while bedding areas are often in wooded areas. When snow covered ground is disturbed by these activities, the relatively warmer underlying ground shows through and mimics a deer's thermal signature. The strength, or brightness, of the feeding or sleeping spot's thermal signature is usually weaker than an active deer but can be quite similar to a quiescent deer. On the accompanying map, such spots are gray in color and represent a 'possible' deer. The count began at 2320 on the 7th and ended one hour and twenty minutes later at 0040, 8 February. On the accompanying maps (north and south section of the park) a deer is marked as a red dot, while a gray dot indicates a possible deer or a place where a deer scratched for food or bedded down in the snow. These gray dots should be given little weight when considering the number of deer in the park.

Geographic Information System Use

If the deer count number and dispersion information is destined for a Geographic Information System (GIS), my recommended method of transferring the data into the GIS is to import the map image file and overlay/register it on an existing map of the park. Use an input device (mouse, pen, etc.) to rapidly note the location of each deer count 'dot' as a new data point. Once these data are entered as a new layer, the imported map can be discarded from GIS, leaving the new 'deer count' layer to be incorporated with other GIS data and maps.

Equipment:

A single-engine Cessna 182 airplane with a high-resolution Mitsubishi M-600 thermal imager oriented 'looking' straight down through a camera hole in the belly of the airplane was used for this count. The thermal imager video output is routed through a video encoder-decoder (VED) that labels the video with a

continuous stream of GPS-derived position, time, date, speed and altitude information. A guide to the alpha-numeric annotation seen on the accompanying videotape is appended to this report and attached to each videotape. A bar code of the same GPS alphanumeric information is recorded on the far left side of the imagery and may not be visible on a conventional TV screen. The bar-coded information is used by the VED during video playback and analysis. The annotated video imagery is recorded with a Sony GV-D900 digital video cassette recorder using mini-DV videotape capable of storing 500 horizontal lines of video information (over 50% more than the 330 lines found on conventional VHS videotape.) The mapping program used for marking the count area borders and laying out the flight lines is DeLorme's GPS Link II and Map Expert version 2.0.

Flight Methodology:

The counts were flown at an average altitude of 1500 feet above ground level. The camera view directly below the airplane from that altitude is 374 feet wide on the ground surface. Flight lines were spaced an average of 325 feet apart to allow for image overlap and 100 percent coverage of the study area. A 'bread crumb' feature of the mobile mapping software used for the flight allows me to track my flight path and helps guide me along predetermined flight lines to assure complete coverage. The recording device is normally paused during the turns outside the study area, hence the tape appears to jump from the end of one run to the beginning of the next.

Analysis Methodology:

After the flight, I analyze the videotape using a TV monitor and a computer monitor. As the videotape plays, the VED decodes the bar-coded GPS signal that was received from the GPS during the video recording. The VED recreates the original GPS signal and sends it to the computer so the mobile mapping software 'thinks' it is receiving a live signal. The mapping software shows the moving position of the airplane superimposed on a street map on the computer screen while the recorded infrared imagery of the area below the airplane is visible on the TV monitor. The GPS updates the airplane position once per second throughout the flight and at the same rate during the post-flight analysis.

To count the deer, I watch the tape in its entirety, pausing and playing it backward and forward at regular speed and in slow motion, as necessary. Generally, for each hour of tape, between three and six hours of analysis are required to complete the count. As I view the tape and note the deer, I mark them on a computer version of the maps accompanying this report. When I have viewed the entire tape, I count the dots on the map to find the number of deer in the count area. If I note large domestic animals on the computer map, I mark them with a different color dot. In these counts, red dots denote deer, gray dots (if any) denote possible deer or other unknown animal similar in size to a deer but apparently not a deer and blue dots (if any) represent domestic animals such as cows, sheep or horses. These animals are always much warmer and in the case of horses and cattle, substantially larger than any deer.

Deer usually appear as a fairly bright white dot or narrow line in the infrared imagery. In this imagery, white and lighter shades of gray represents warmer objects while black and darker shades of gray are cooler. Other white (warmest in the scene) objects that are common are roads and pavement that retain latent heat from sunshine during the day, man hole covers, street lights, house lights, fires, furnace stacks on houses, car engines that are running or have run recently, groundwater seepages, puddles, ponds, streams, rivers and large rocks and boulders in the woods. Other animals in the picture are often white or bright. Domestic animals are commonly very bright—hotter than deer, which have highly insulated coats.

In order to count deer with a high degree of confidence and accuracy, several factors have to be taken into account. Among them are deer infrared signatures, background infrared signatures, deer behavior and location. Questions I am commonly asked, and the answers I give, include the following:

Q. How do you know you are not counting the same deer twice?

Given:

- deer are not disturbed by a light plane flying more than a quarter of a mile above them,
- deer often congregate in groups of two or more—up to 20 or more in extreme cases,
- deer generally move very slowly as they graze, congregate or rest,
- deer live and act according to generally well known behaviors,
- I fly along a well documented flight path with an 'infrared view' of a known area below the aircraft that is recorded on videotape.

A. With the help of the moving map program, I can place dots representing deer on a map in their respective positions and orientation to one another quite accurately, particularly when referring to the nearby streets, intersections, rivers and streams that may be in view or recently in view on the videotape. As I analyze the tape, becoming quite familiar with the 'neighborhood' of the count area (houses, roads, hills, streams, rivers, golf courses, trails, etc.) and place the dots on the map, I recognize specific deer and groups of deer as I pass them a second and sometimes third time. For example, I may see and place a group of three deer/dots in an equilateral triangle near a trail a few seconds after passing a particular road. In the case where I first saw them they may have been on the right side of my screen. When I fly the next adjacent run, thanks to overlapping imagery, they may appear on the extreme left side of the screen. Very often, they will be in the same spot or not far from it, in the same or similar 'formation' five, ten, fifteen or even thirty minutes later. If I fly along and see a lone deer in the forest, it will still be there in the same general area when I make adjacent passes. On occasion, I will fly over a group of deer in an area, and on subsequent passes, I will see an additional deer that I did not see earlier because it may have been out of the picture, too close to another deer (appearing larger than normal—but not counted as two) or it may have been obscured by a tree or foliage on the first pass. In those cases, I add the dot to the map. In uncommon cases where deer are moving quickly, I will look for them elsewhere in the direction they were originally seen moving. If I later see deer in the vicinity and cannot recognize them as the same group, I have to make a judgment whether to count them or not.

Q. How do you know what you are seeing and counting are deer and not some other animal?

Given:

- there is usually a sizable quantity of deer in the area in which I am flying the deer count,
- there are other wild and domestic animals in the same area, usually in smaller numbers,
- deer don't climb trees,
- deer are somewhat 'brazen' in their occupation of human communities,
- domesticated animals are often corralled, fenced in, densely grouped or tethered,
- deer are notably larger than foxes, raccoons, skunks and most dogs and smaller than cows and horses,
- deer have a variety of apparent temperature ranges/thermal signatures but are nearly always cooler than common domestic animals (dogs, horses, cows, sheep),
- skunks, raccoons, and foxes appear to have warmer apparent body temperatures than deer and often look like a bright pinpoint of light in the woods, whereas a deer is larger, usually cooler and with less distinguishable edge contrast with their surroundings (i.e., they look slightly 'fuzzy' around the edges).
- deer congregate more and move less, and generally less rapidly, than small nocturnally active wild animals such as skunks, raccoons, coyotes and foxes.

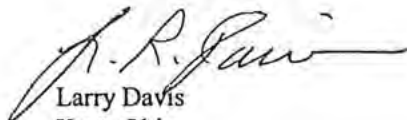
A. Experience, practice and experiments with the Michigan Department of Natural Resources in counting and identifying a variety of captive animal types have given me high confidence in identifying deer in their normal forest and suburban habitats. The deer that I have difficulty identifying and counting are those that are partially hidden from view in evergreen vegetation or exhibit such a low apparent temperature (thermal signature) that I cannot see them or distinguish them sufficiently enough to identify them as deer, or even as animals. I do not count 'white dots or blobs' that I do not have a strong feeling are deer. Close examination of most infrared deer count videotapes will reveal to the viewer quite a few animals in trees or on the ground that do not appear on the deer count map. These animals are most likely

to be something other than deer. My deer counts are generally considered a minimum number, as opposed to a maximum. Some deer will go undetected in nearly every environment.

Q. How accurate is the count?

A. I don't know, I believe an average of 90% is in the ballpark, perhaps better. Conventional methods (deer-car collisions, spotlighting, pellet counts) are considered to be accurate within 30 to 40 percent—not a high number. In this method, we are looking at 100% of the area in question and under good conditions all active deer not hidden from view should be seen and counted with infrared.

Note: Viewers of the VHS videotape should be able to see most of the deer noted on the accompanying map(s) without having to pause or rewind the tape. The quality of even a first-generation VHS videotape is noticeably inferior to digital videotape and some deer may be difficult to discern. I recommend against making copies of the provided VHS tapes, since the quality will suffer substantially. I will retain the digital videotape original of this deer count for at least one year. If additional copies are required, please communicate with Davis Aviation.



Larry Davis
Kent, Ohio

davises@sprintmail.com
(330) 677-8612

Video annotation guide:

Date	Time	Altitude MSL
MAR20/99	0030:56.213	-05,9/00,02157F
0111,3910.860N	08444.294W	74KTS,092
Latitude	Longitude	Grnd Speed Course



LEGEND

- State Route
- Geo Feature
- Town, Small City
- Park
- US Highway
- Population Center
- Street, Road
- Major Street/Road

- Interstate Highway
- State Route
- US Highway
- River
- Open Water
- Contours

Scale 1:18,750 (at center)

2000 Feet

500 Meters

Mill Creek '00 - North








Mag 15.00

Sat Mar 04 18:08:48 2000



© 1993 DeLorme Mapping

LEGEND

-  Interstate, Turnpike
-  Population Center
-  Street, Road
-  Major Street/Road
-  Interstate Highway
-  River
-  Contours

Scale 1:18,750 (at center)

2000 Feet

500 Meters

Mill Creek '00 - South

Mag 15.00

Sat Mar 04 19:02:31 2000

Appendix B: Deer Damage Photographic Log



White-tailed Deer in Mill Creek MetroParks

Photographic Log – 2022



Board of Park Commissioners

7574 Columbiana-Canfield Rd.

Canfield, Ohio 44406

Mahoning County, Ohio



Introduction

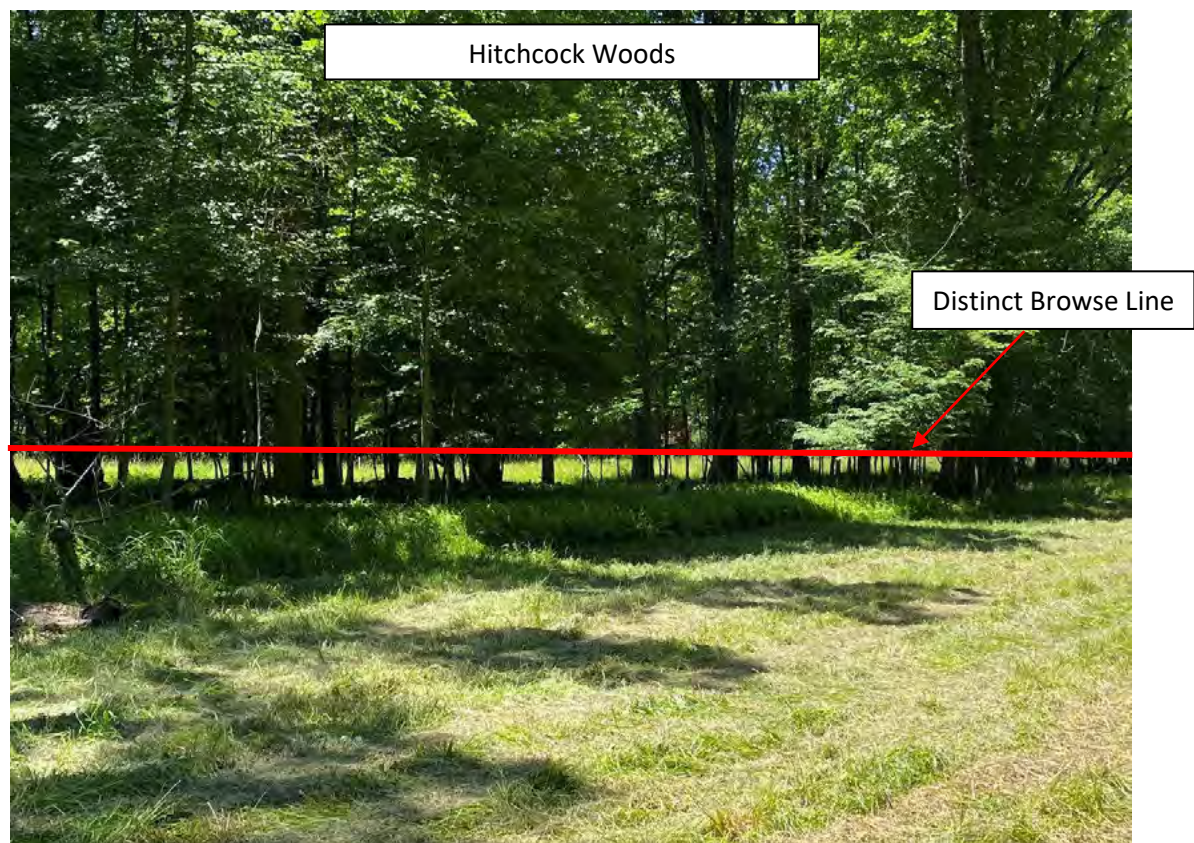
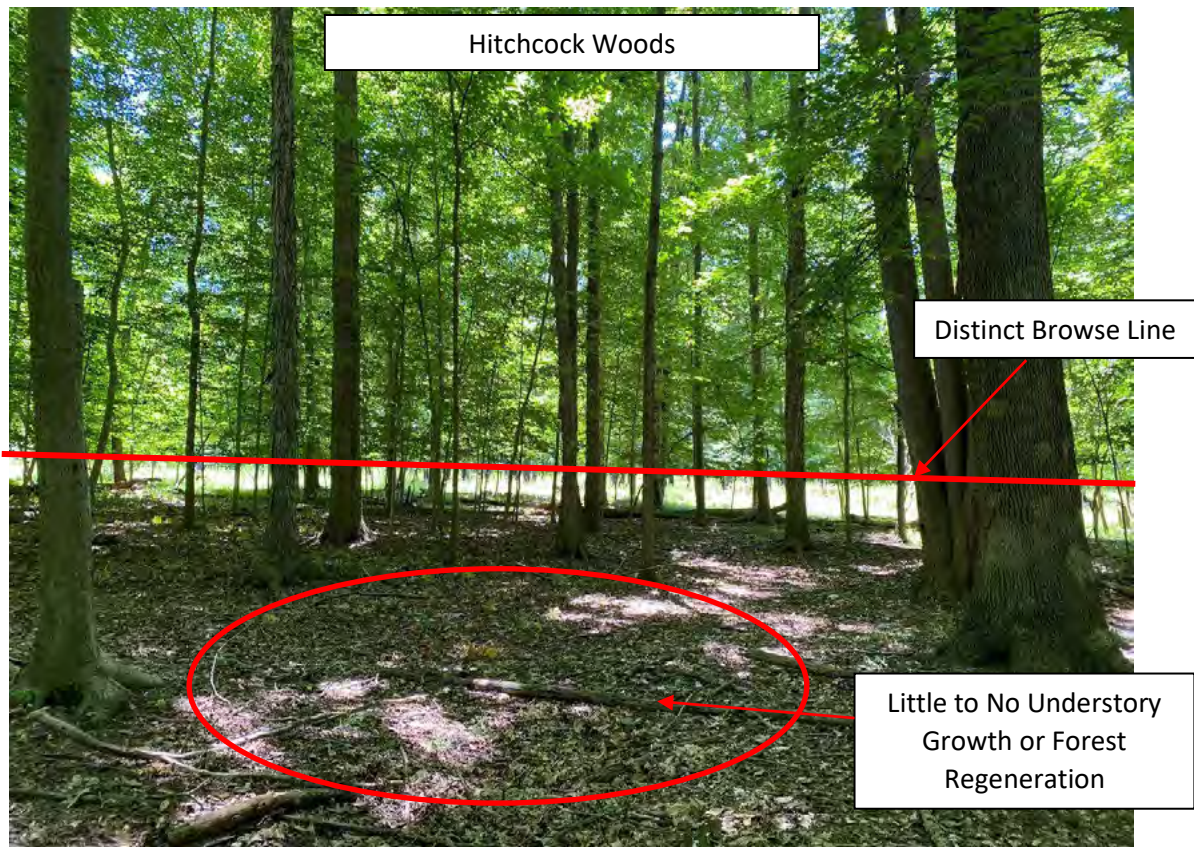
These photograph locations highlight examples of deer browse damage in forested and/or landscaped areas throughout the MetroParks, with the most notable impacts being visible at Hitchcock Woods, Huntington Woods, and Mill Creek Park. Negative ecological impacts commonly associated with an overabundance of white-tailed deer such as visible browse lines, limited forest understory growth, and a prevalence of invasive species are commonplace throughout MetroParks facilities, consistent with the data collected from the January 2022 population survey.

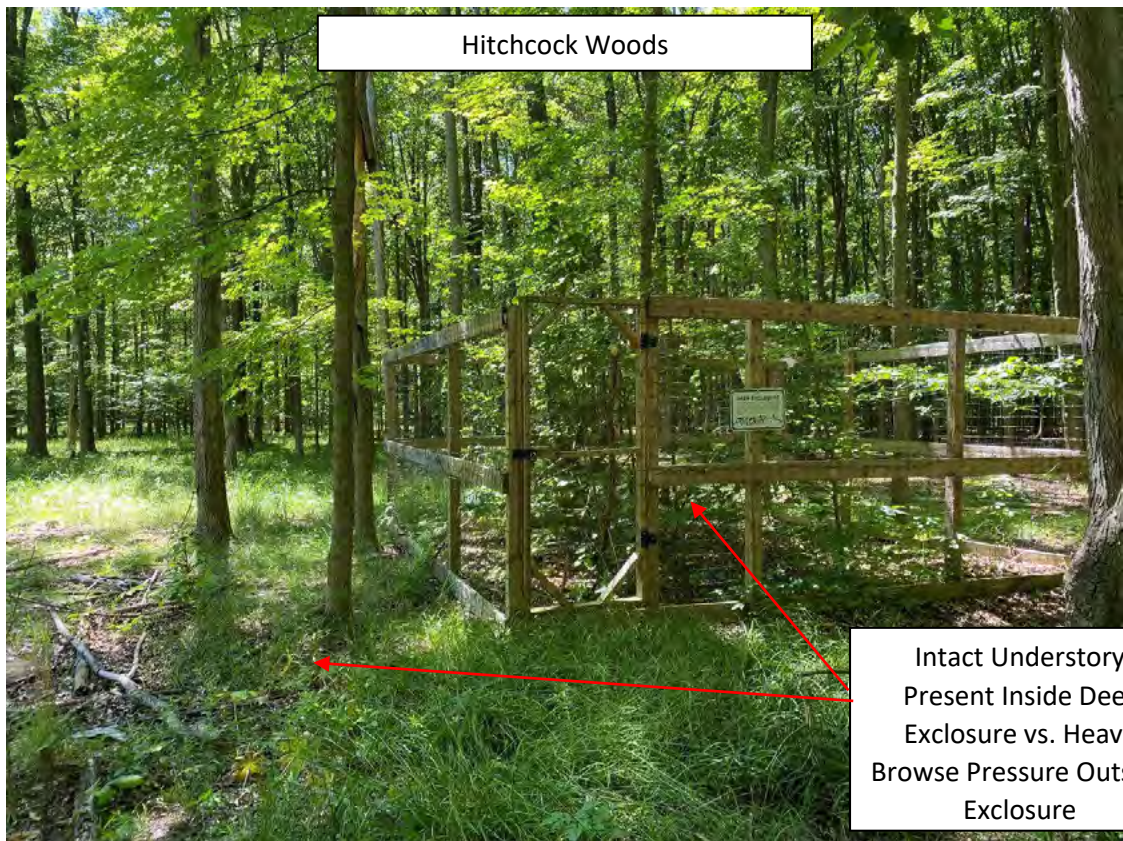
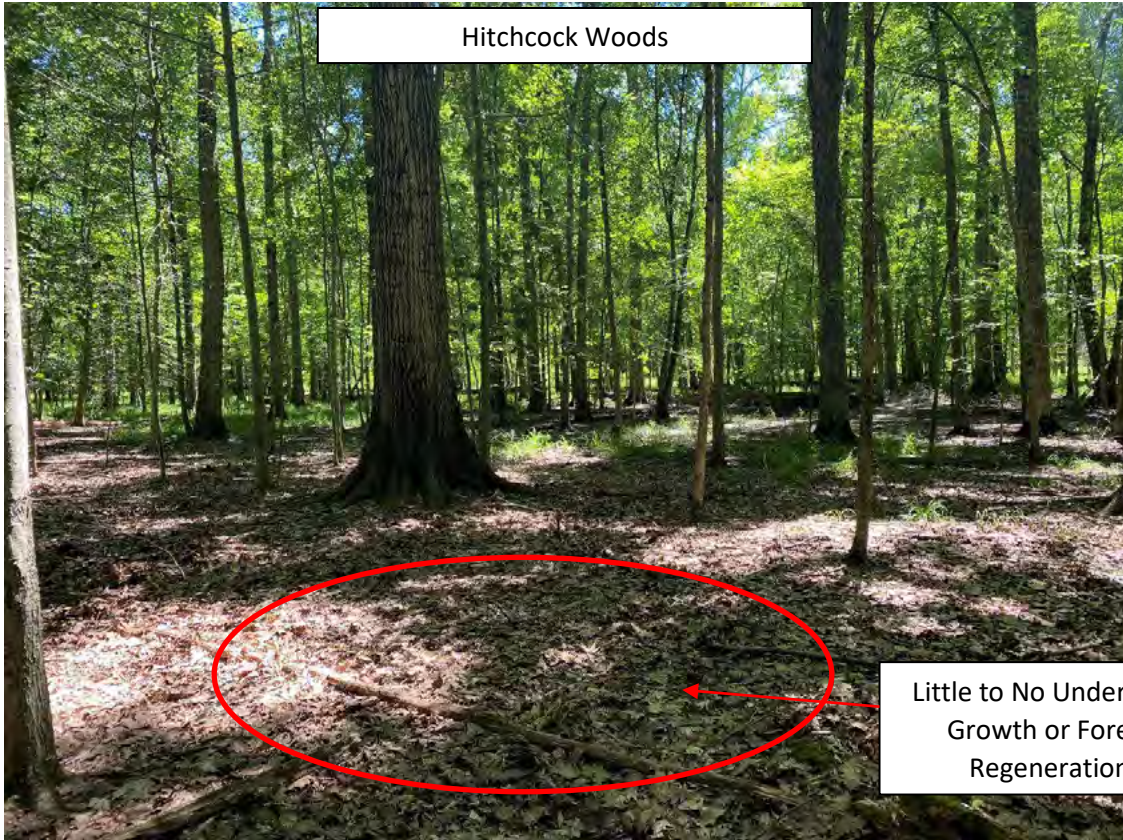
January 2022 Aerial Infrared Survey Results:

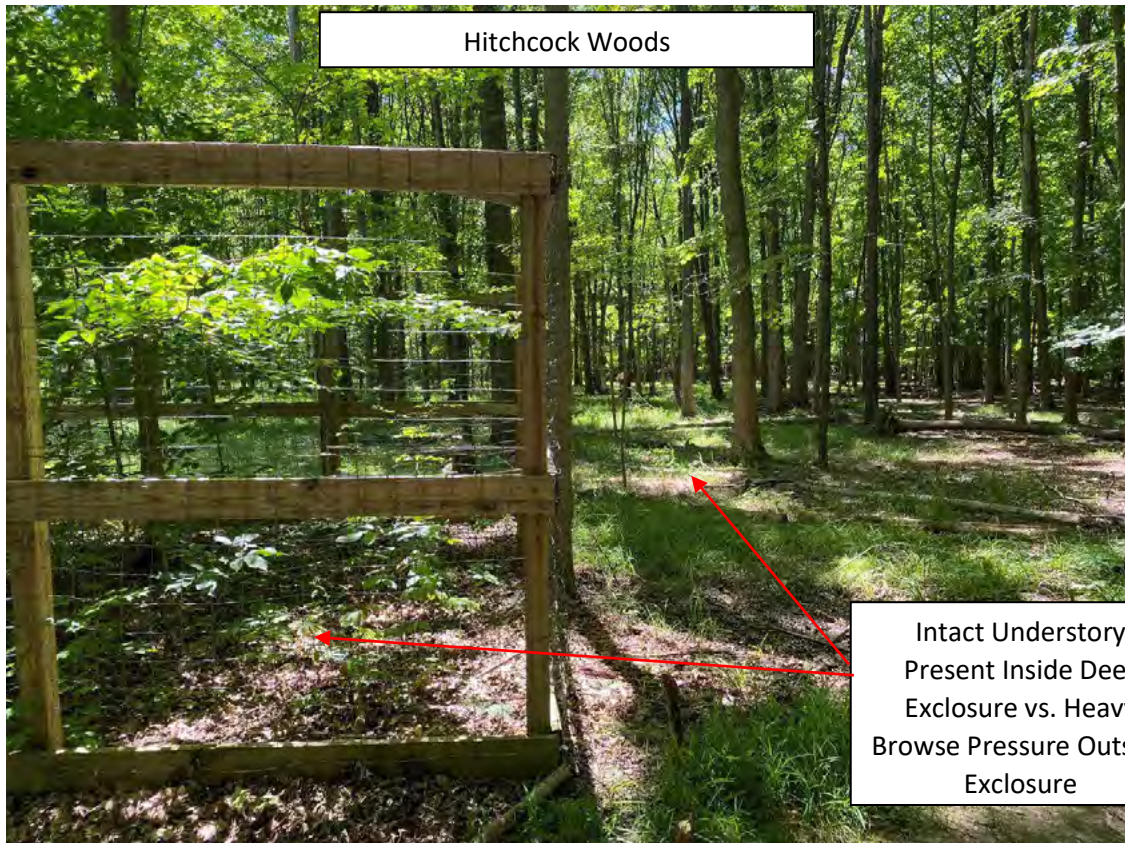
				Thermal Signatures Observed within Park Boundaries			
	Park	Park Size (acres)	Park size (sq miles)	Count	Acres per Deer	Deer per Acre	Deer per Sq Mile
Central	Mill Creek Park	1,626	2.54	903	1.80	0.56	355
	Hitchcock Woods	689	1.08	429	1.61	0.62	398
	Huntington Woods	383	0.60	354	1.08	0.92	592
	Mill Creek Wildlife Sanctuary	482	0.75	267	1.81	0.55	355
	Collier Preserve	303	0.47	124	2.44	0.41	262
East	McGuffey Wildlife Preserve	78	0.12	48	1.63	0.62	394
	Yellow Creek	76	0.12	80	0.95	1.05	674
	Springfield Forest	89	0.14	69	1.29	0.78	496
	Cranberry Run Headwaters	27	0.04	19	1.42	0.70	450
West	Vickers Nature Preserve	262	0.41	116	2.26	0.44	283
	Sebring Woods	39	0.06	37	1.05	0.95	607
	Egypt Swamp Preserve	75	0.12	54	1.39	0.72	461
	Sawmill Creek	167	0.26	141	1.18	0.84	540
	MetroParks Farm	402	0.63	197	2.04	0.49	314
	Hawkins Marsh	161	0.25	97	1.66	0.60	386
Totals and Averages:		4,859	7.59	2,935	1.66	0.60	387

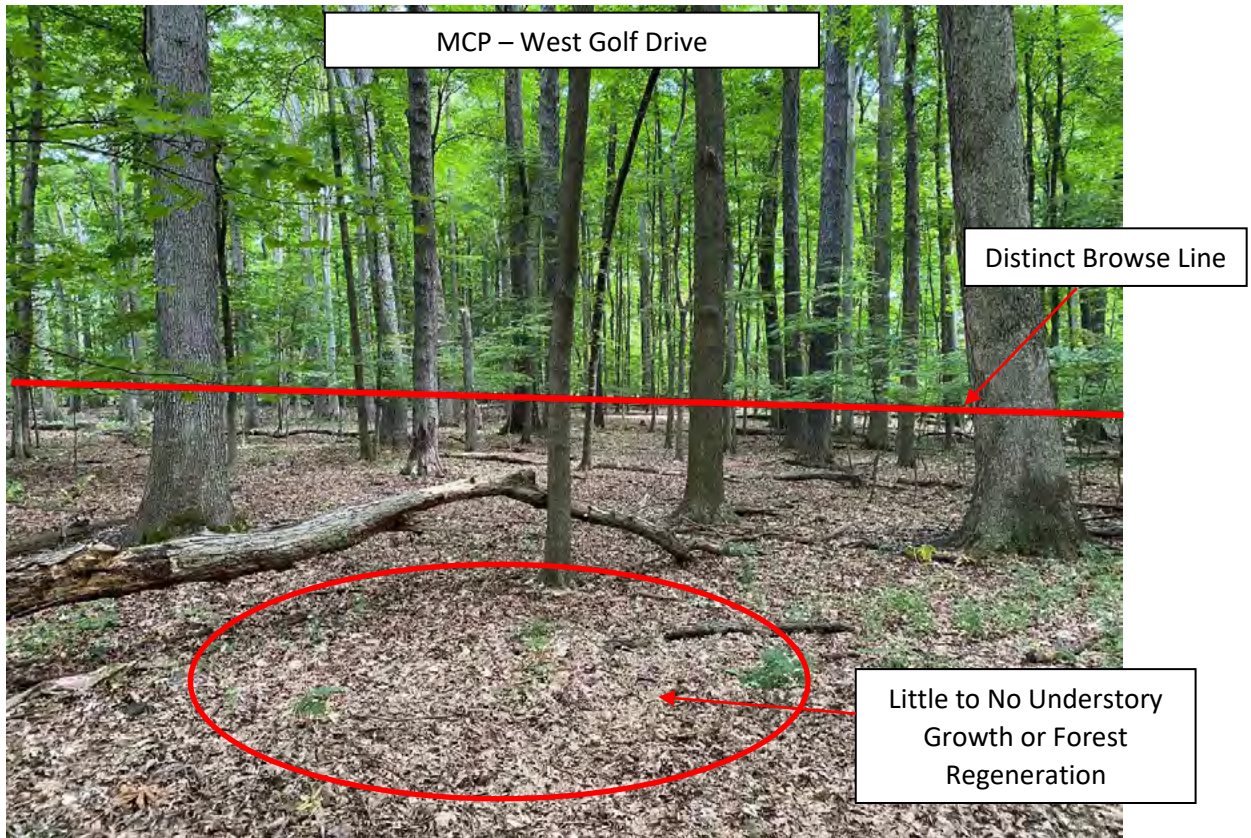
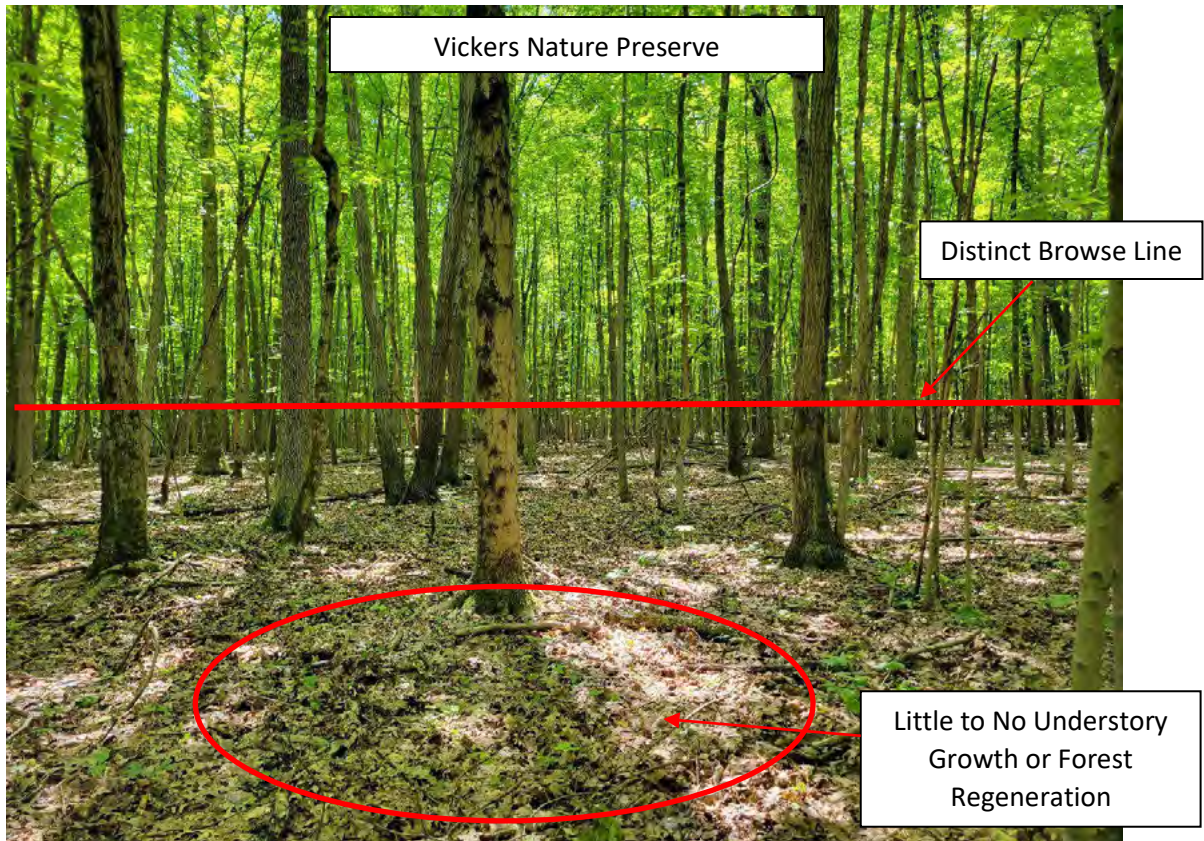
Recommended Population Densities Are 10-20 Deer/Mi² to Remain Below Ecological Carrying Capacity.

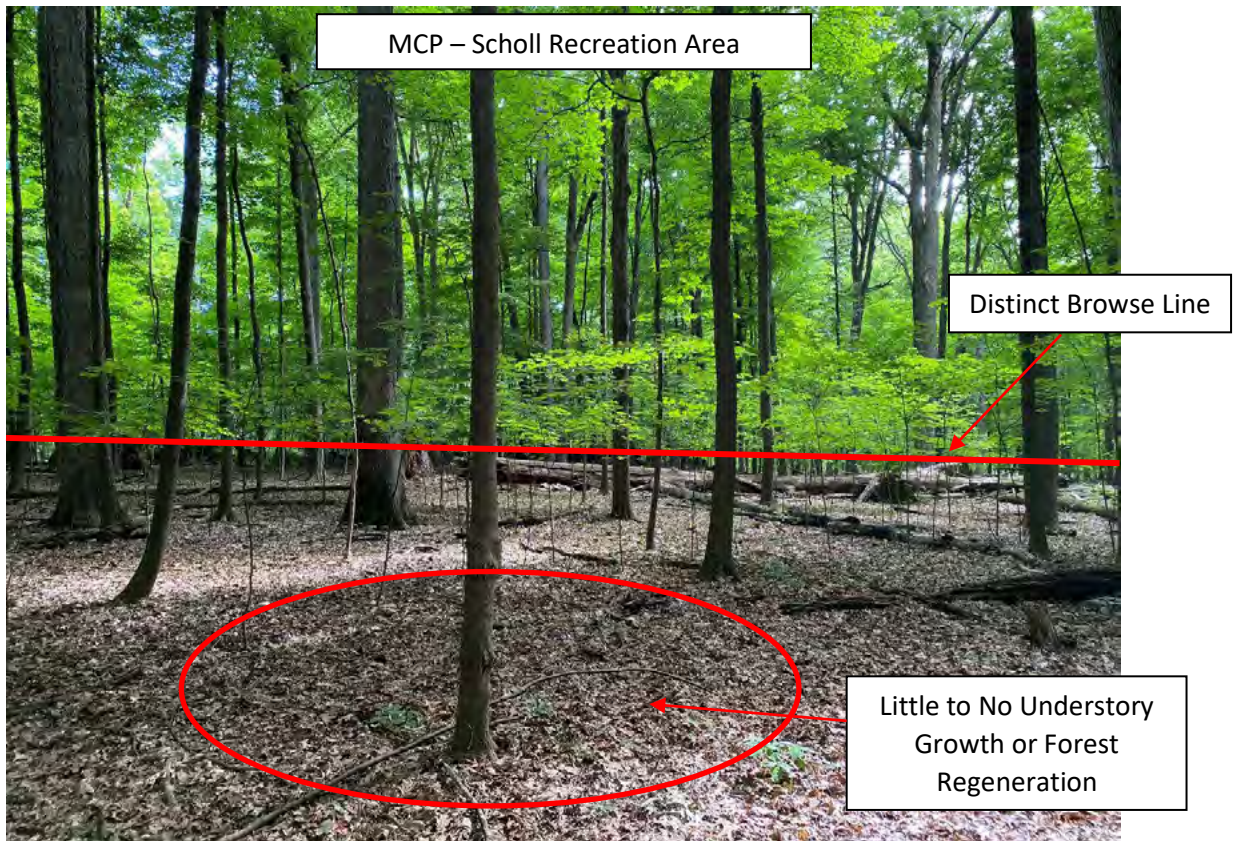
Our Results Average 387 Deer/Mi²

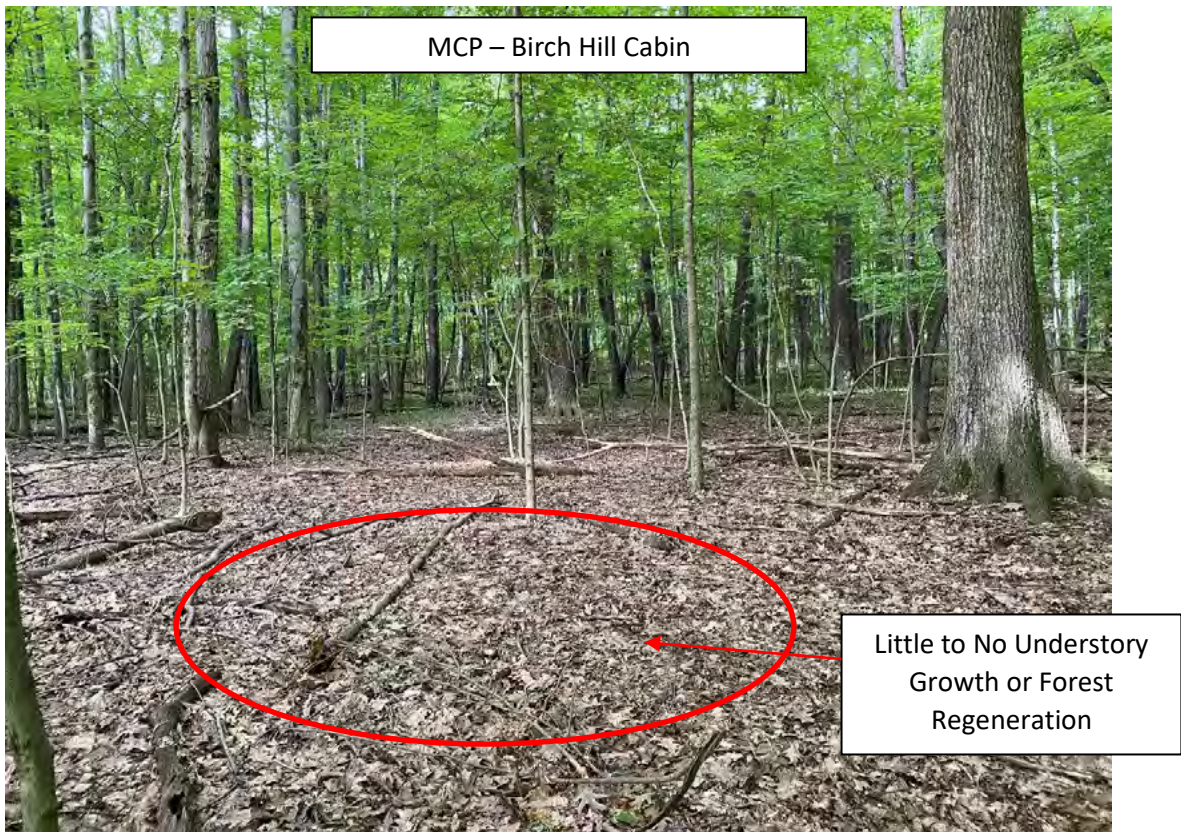
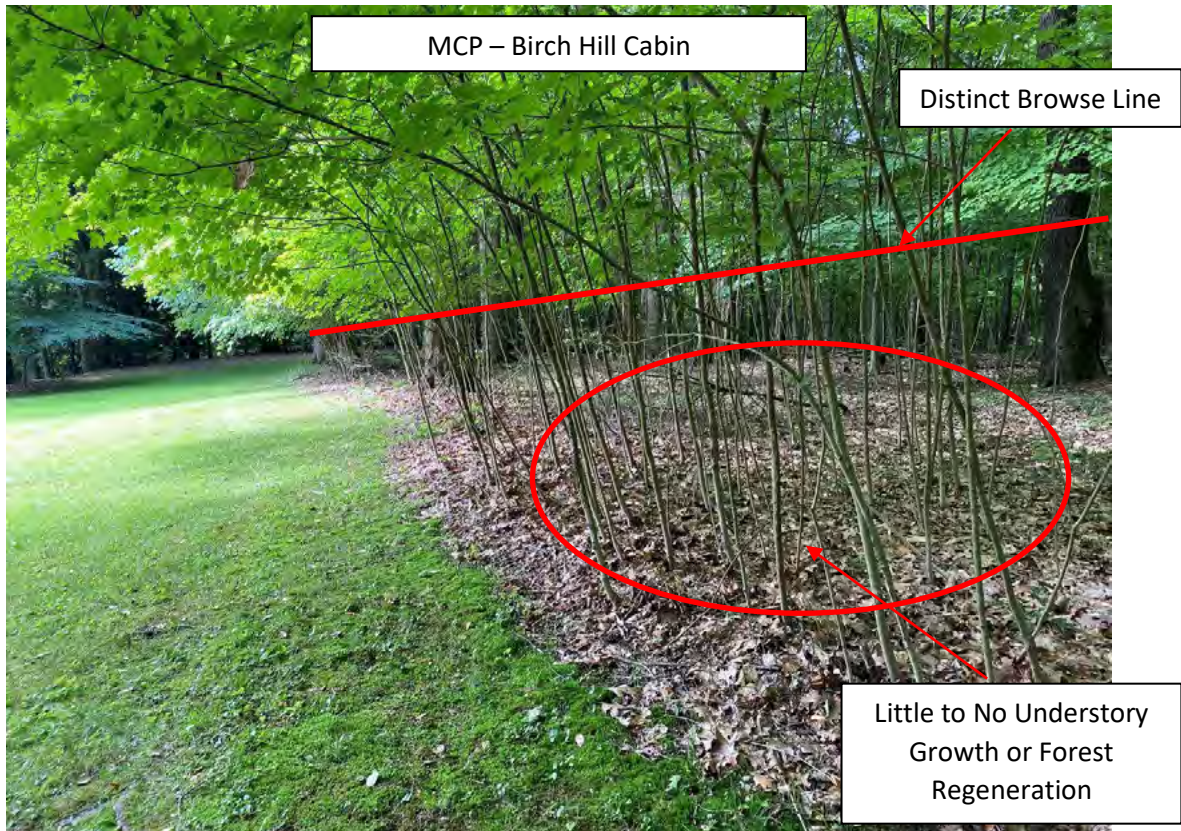


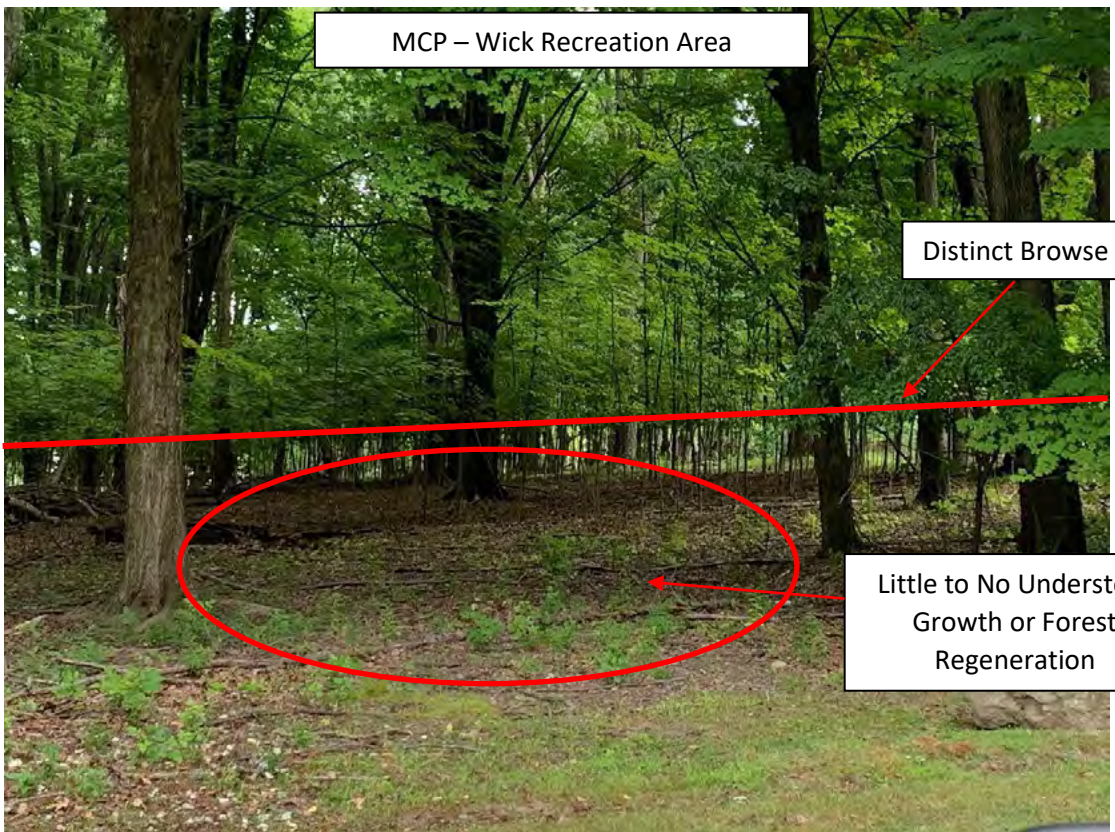
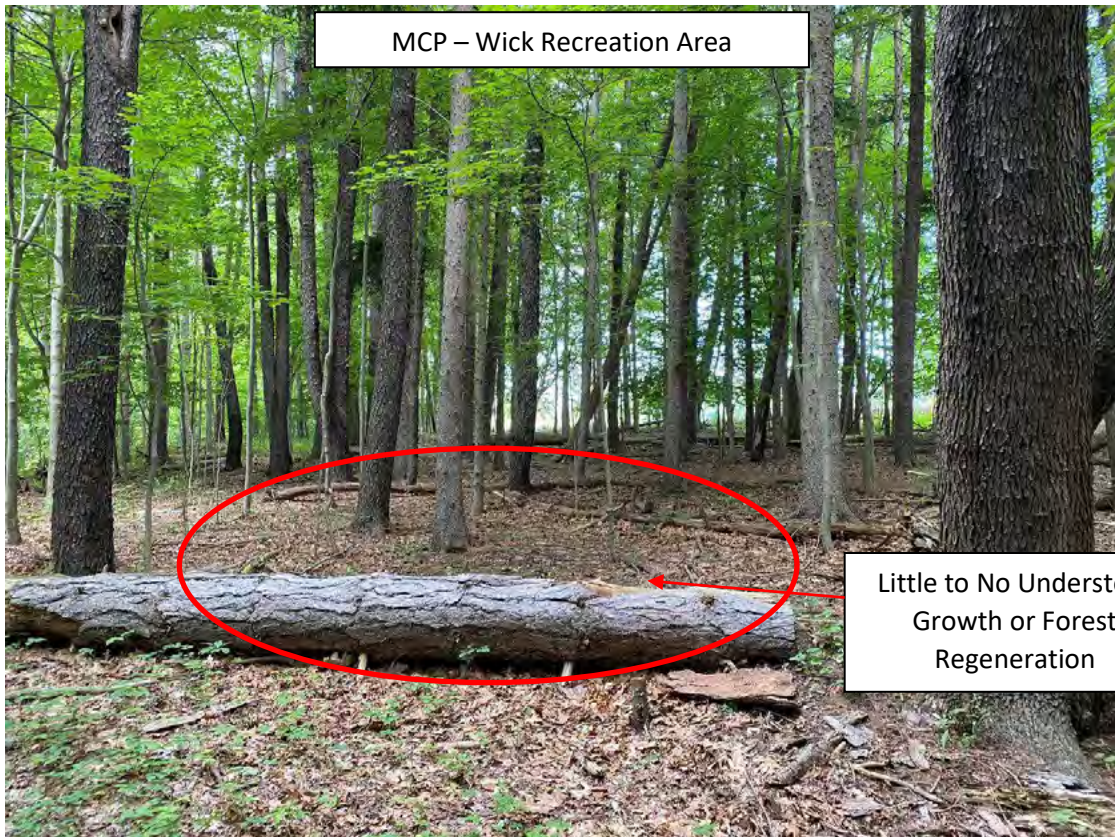


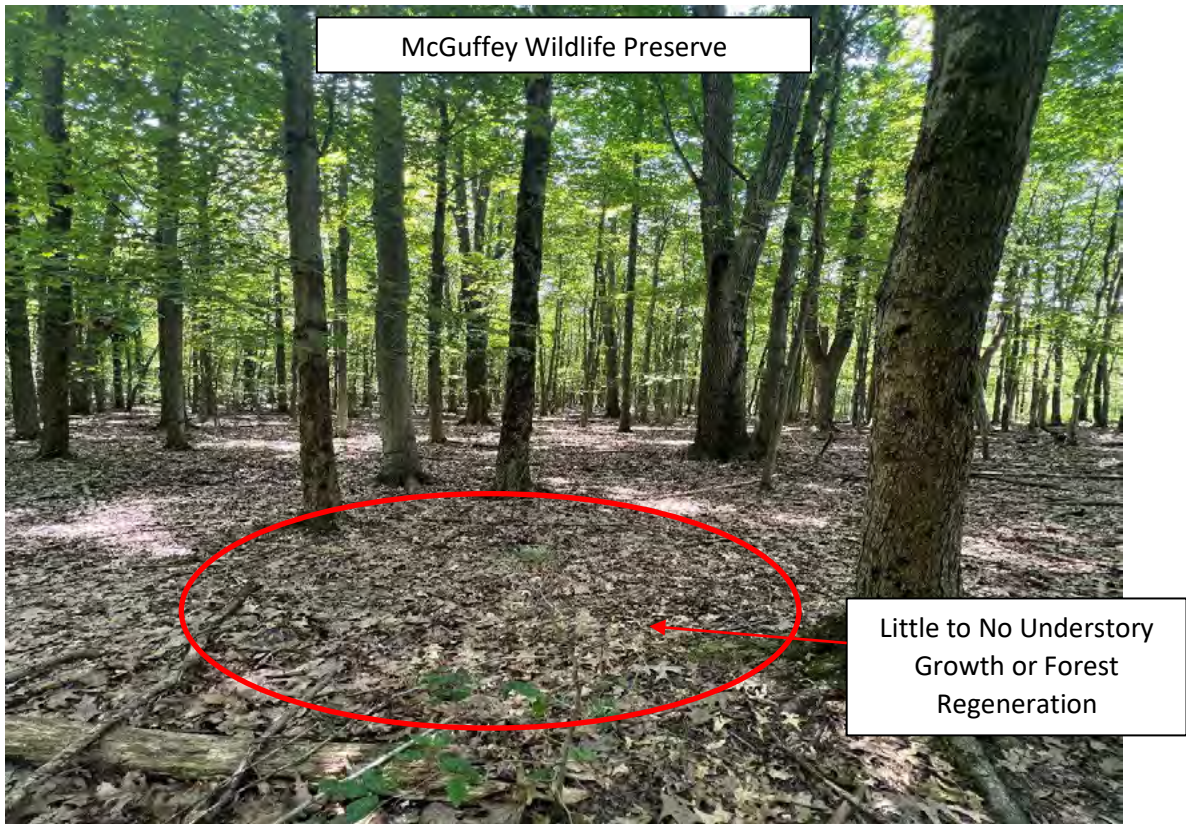
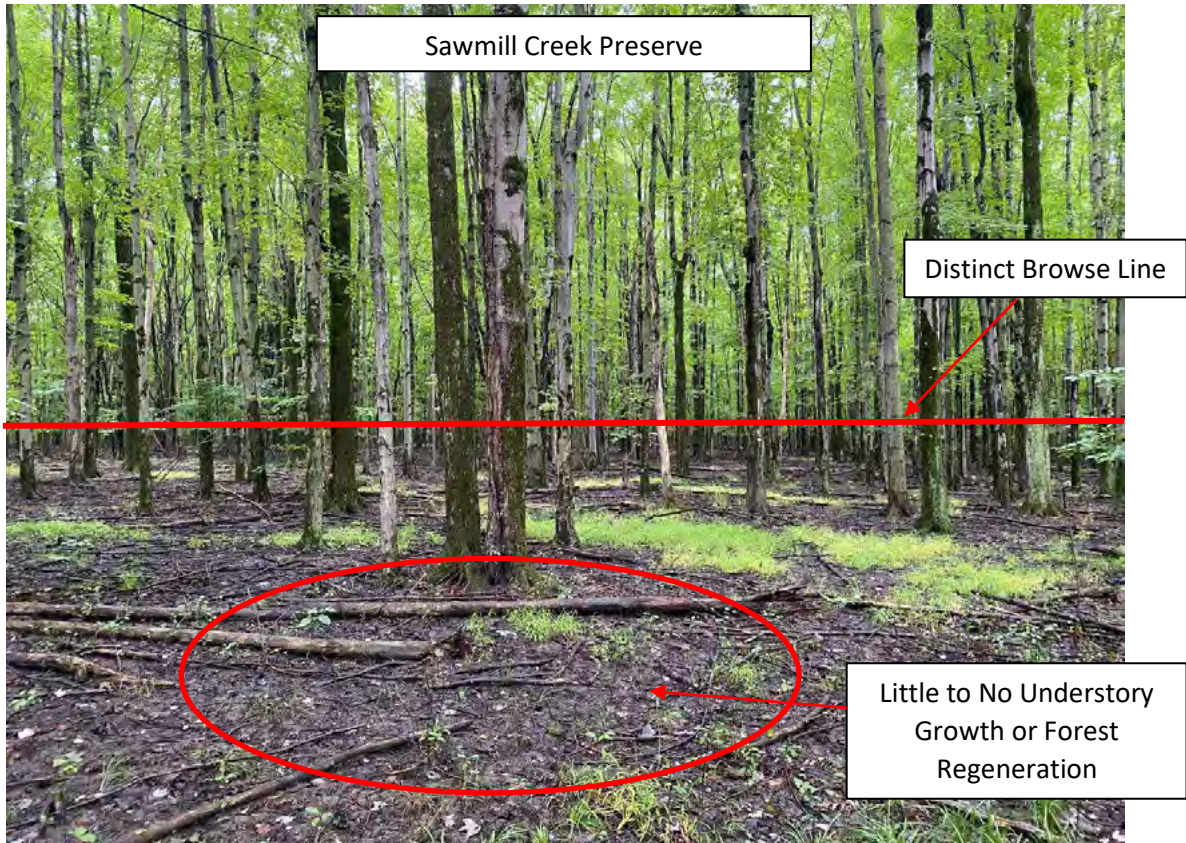


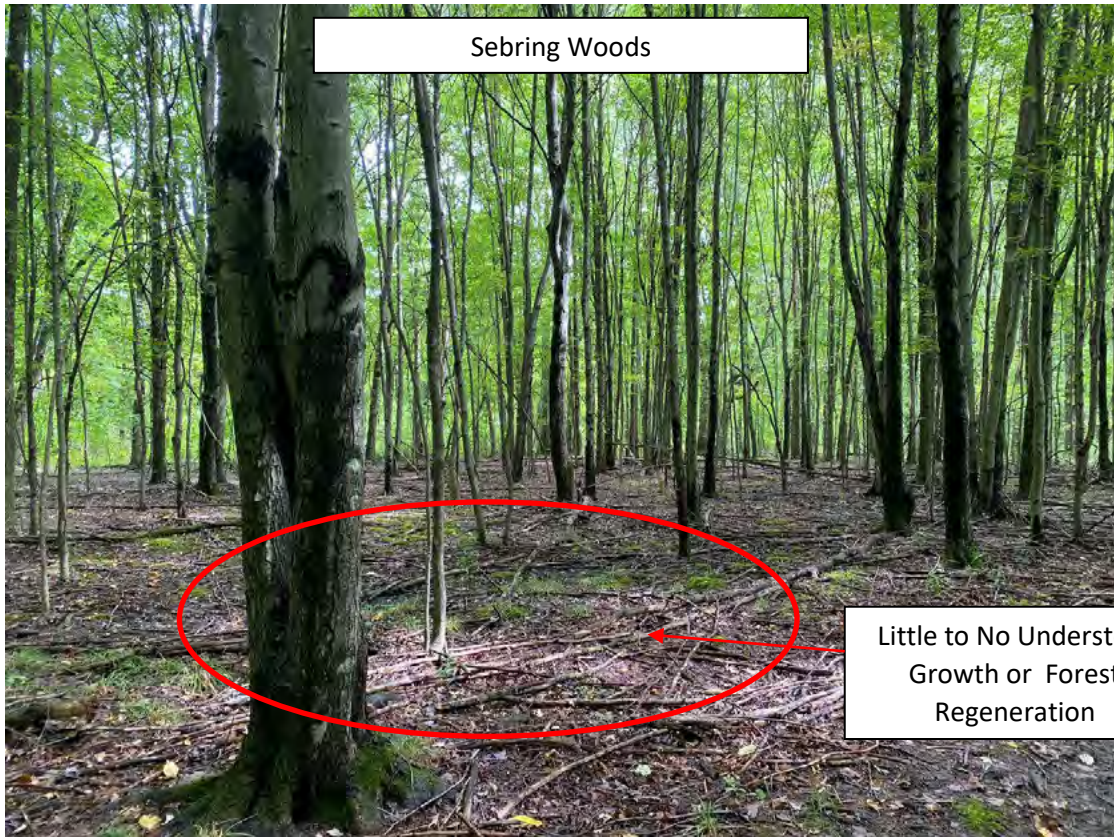






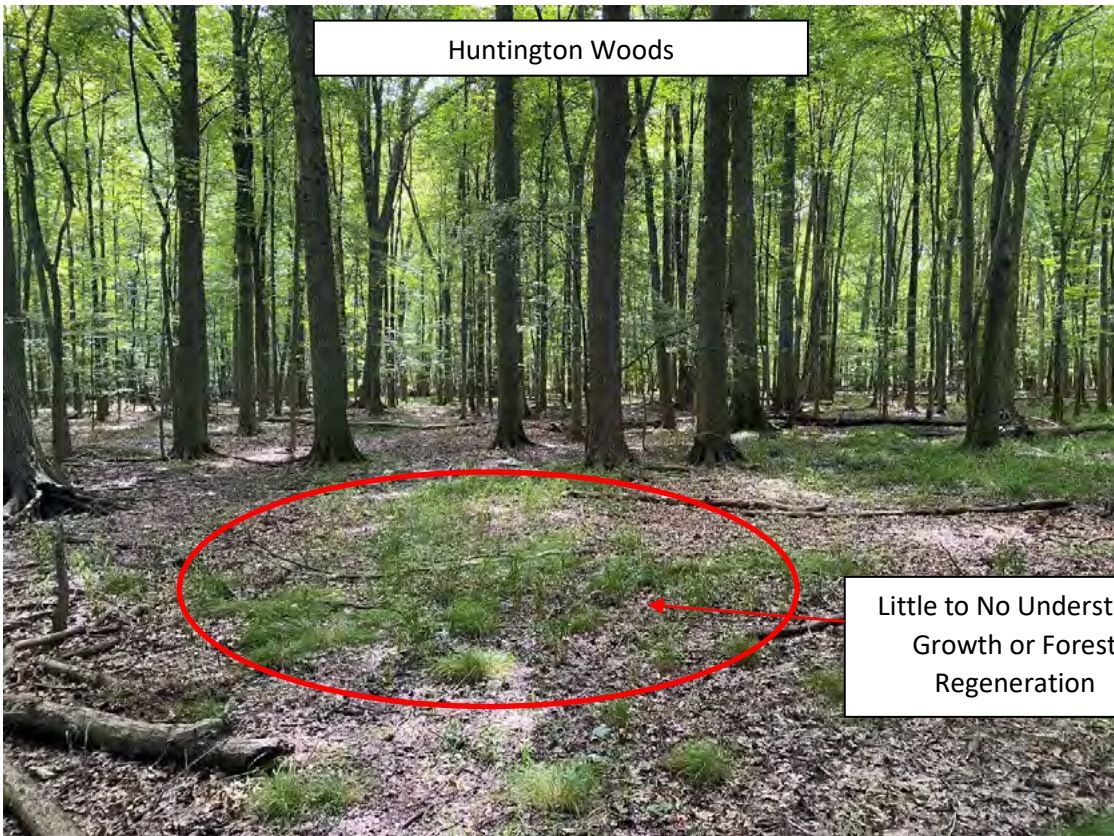






Sebring Woods

Little to No Understory
Growth or Forest
Regeneration



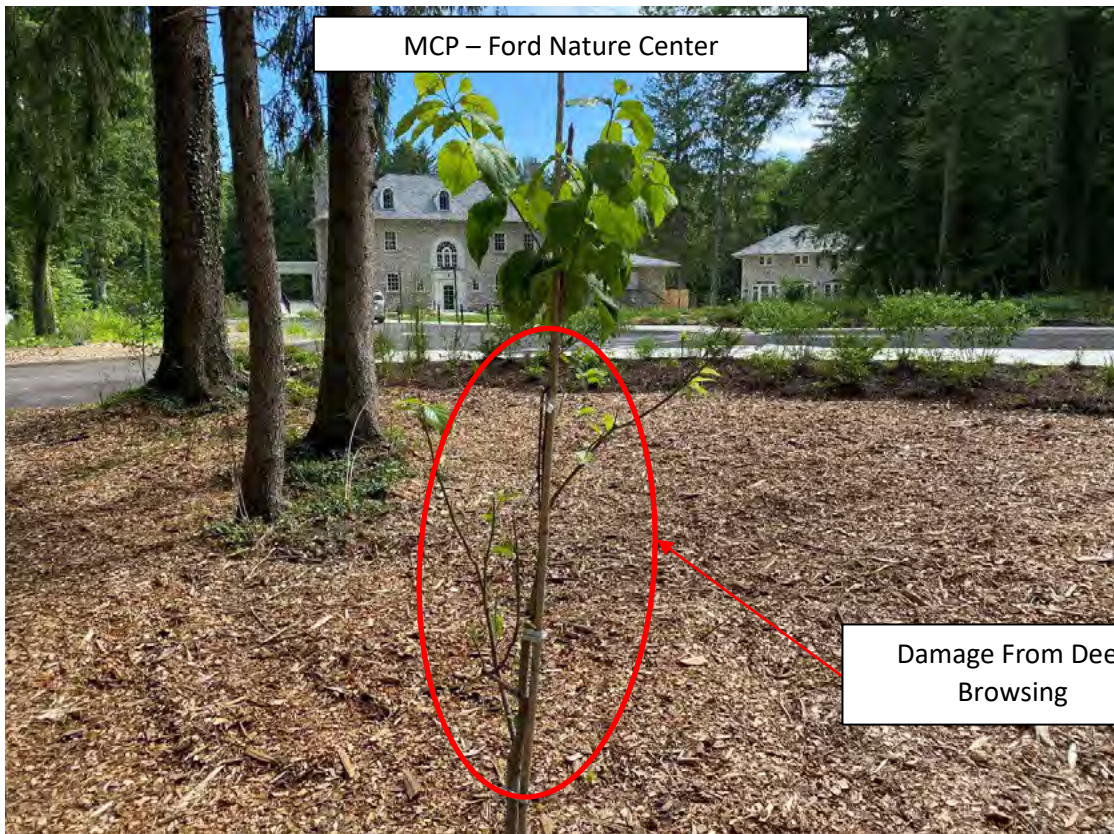
Huntington Woods

Little to No Understory
Growth or Forest
Regeneration



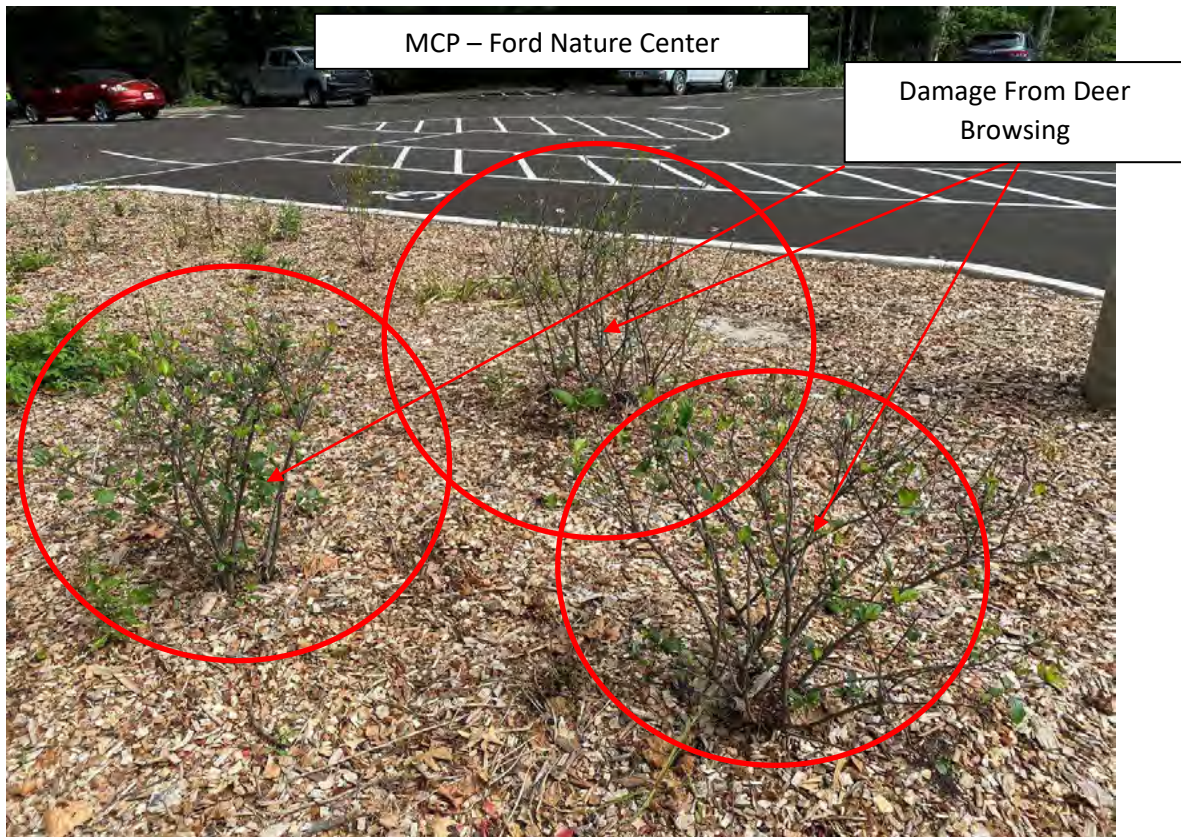
Huntington Woods

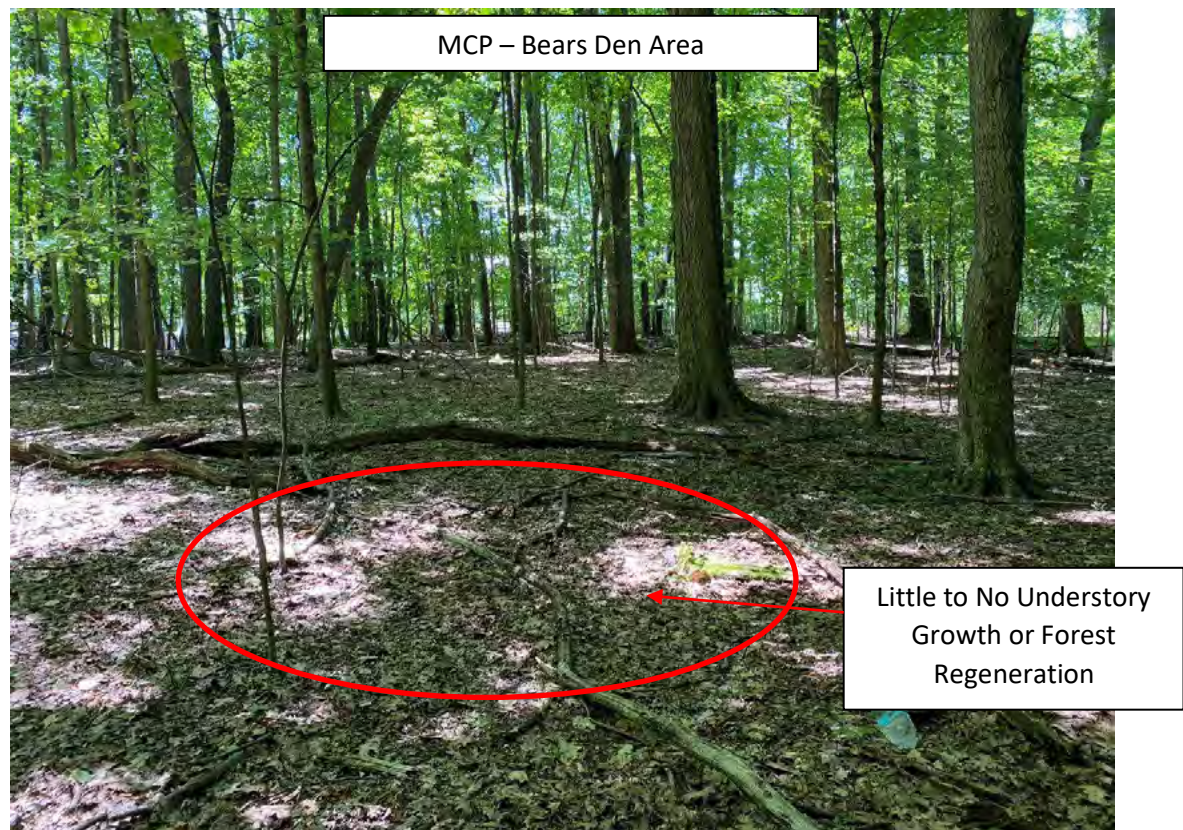
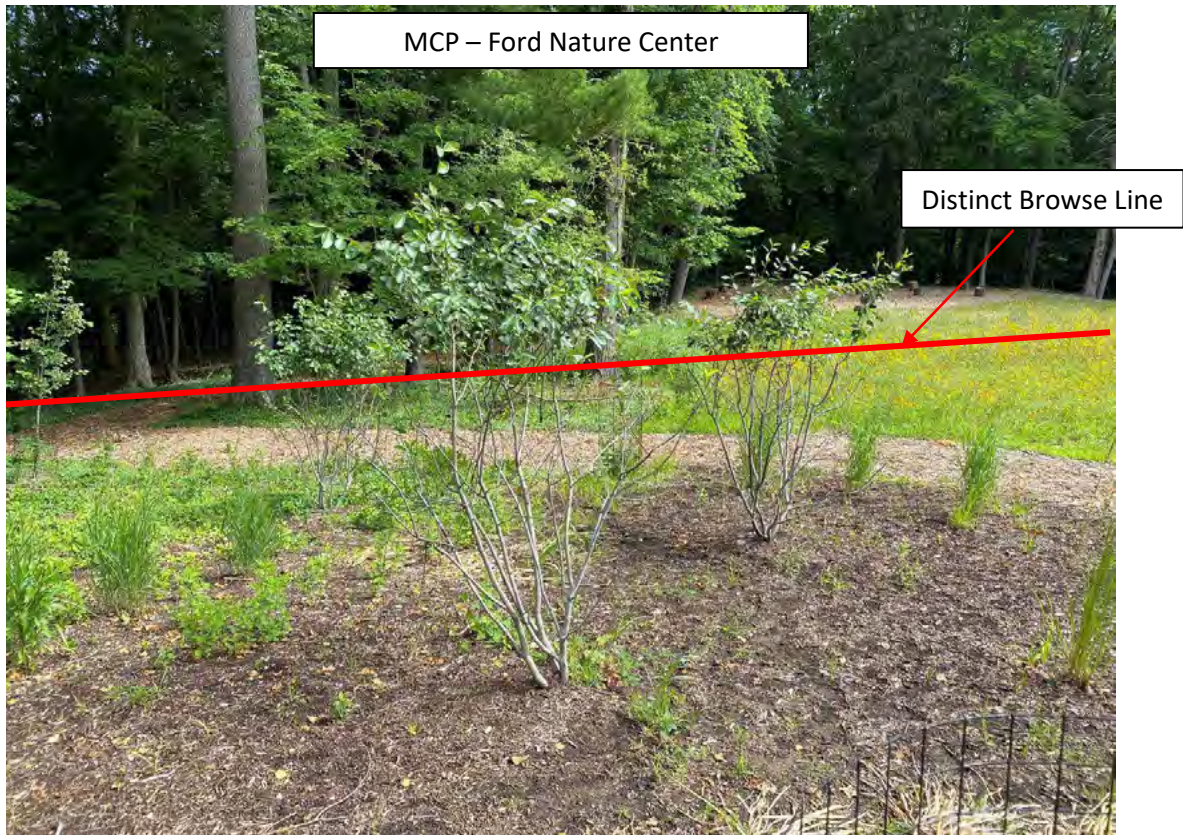
Little to No Understory
Growth or Forest
Regeneration

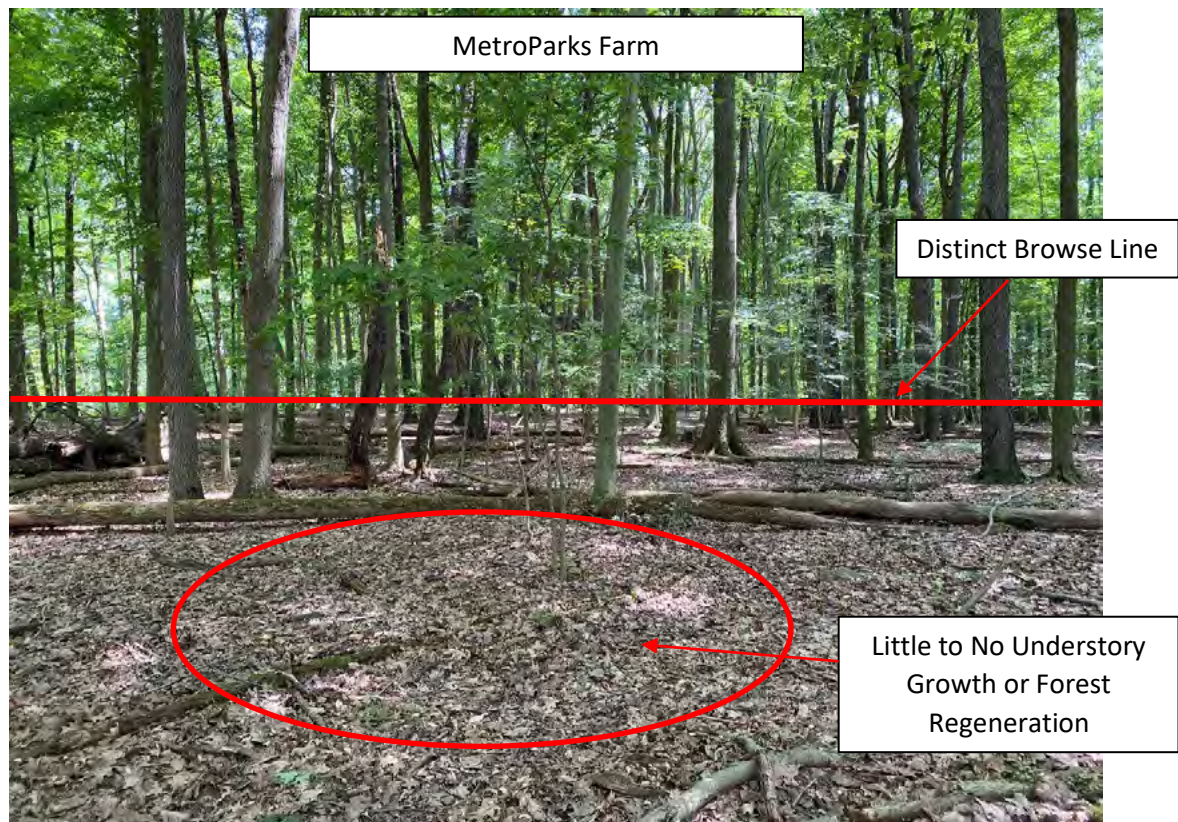
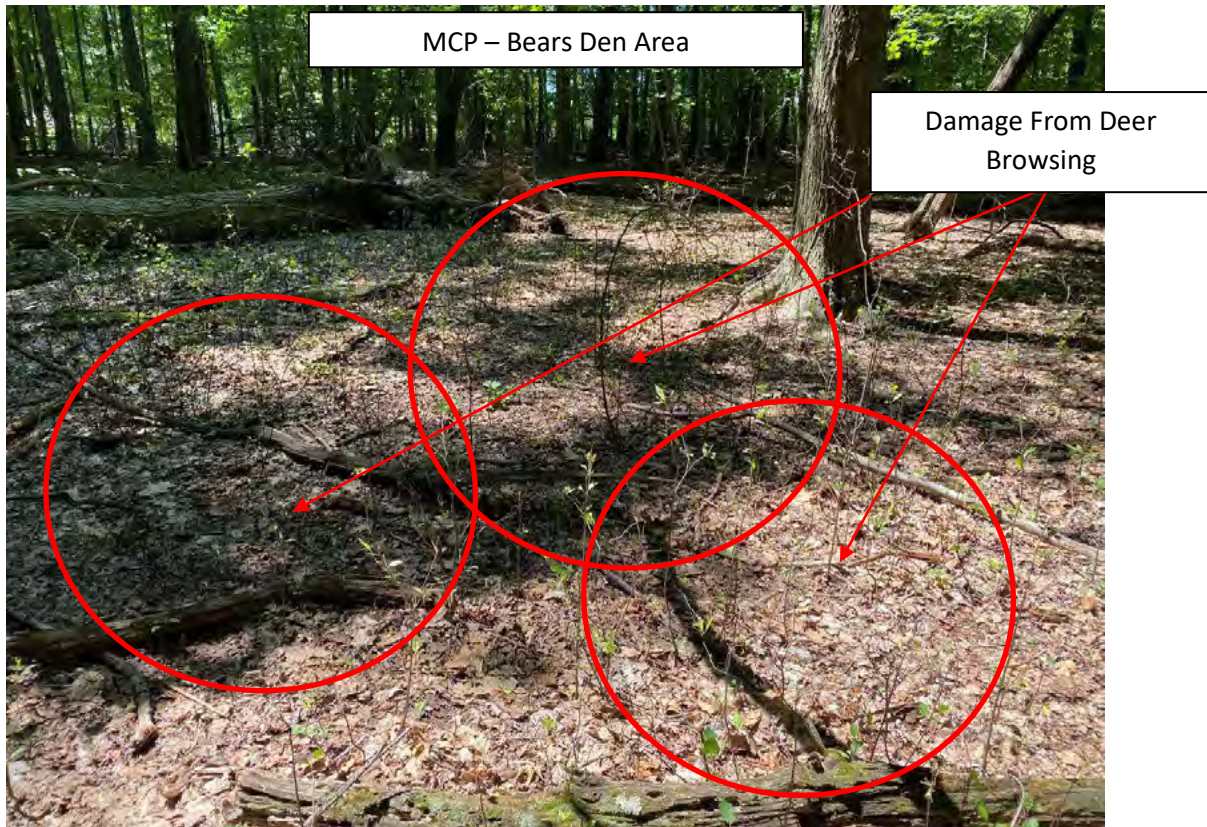


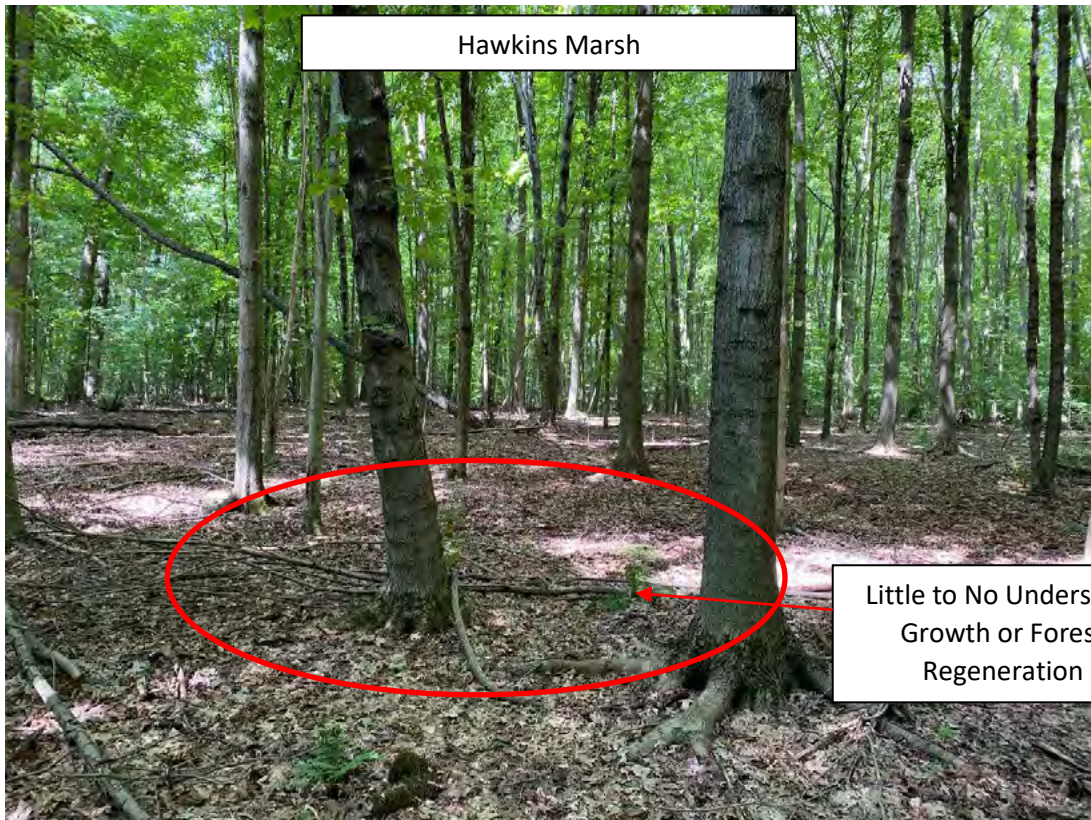
MCP – Ford Nature Center

Damage From Deer
Browsing









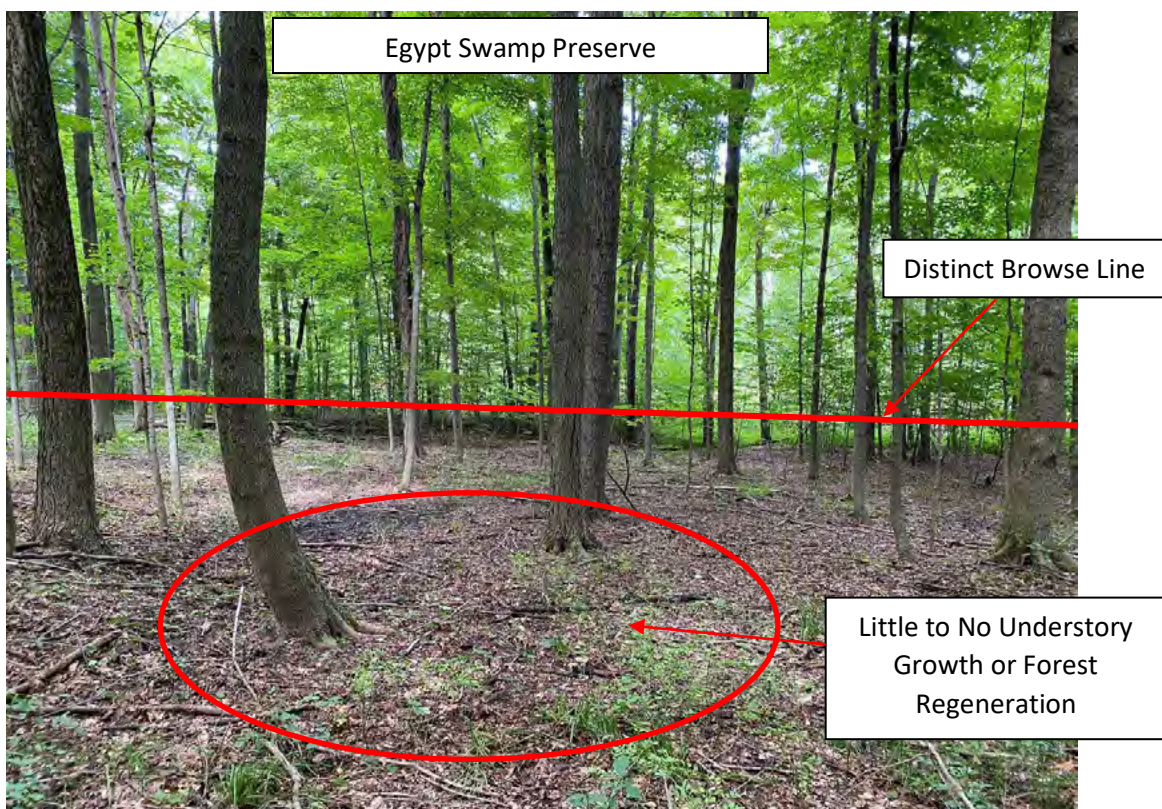
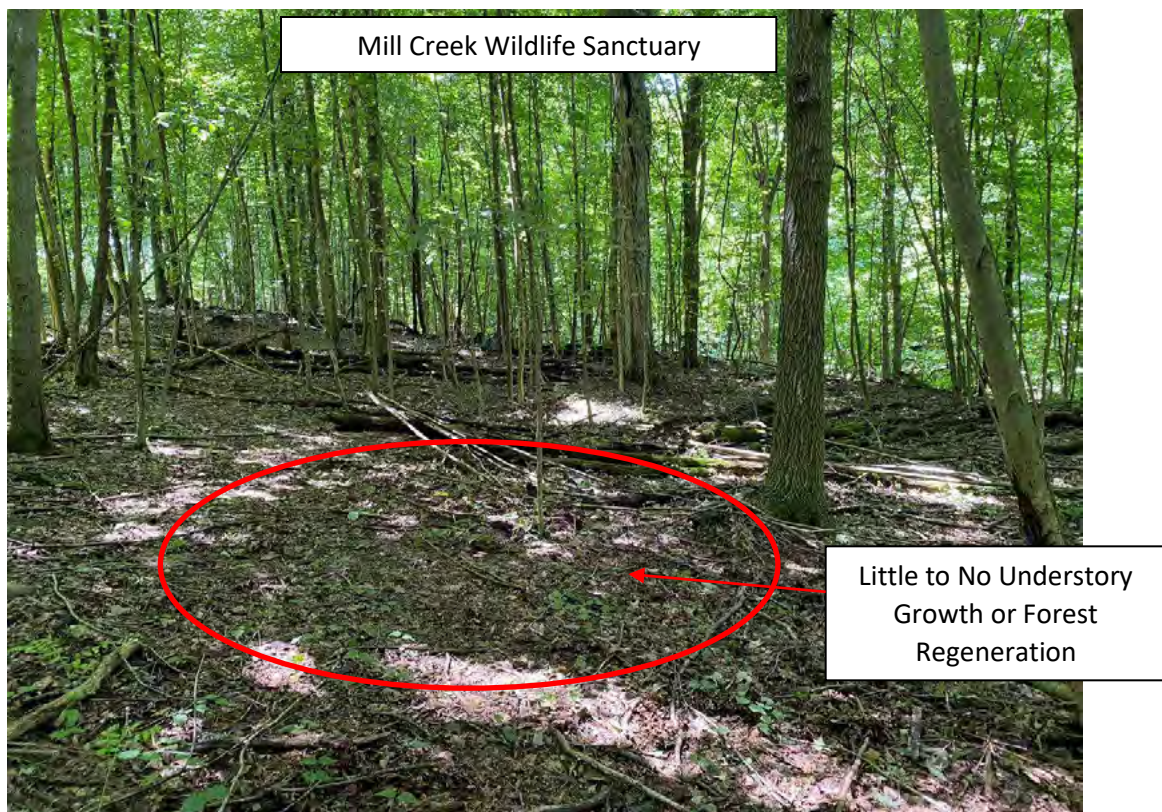
Hawkins Marsh

Little to No Understory
Growth or Forest
Regeneration



Springfield Forest

Little to No Understory
Growth or Forest
Regeneration



Appendix C: Description of Properties



Description of Properties to be Managed

Collier Preserve

Acquired in 2006 and 2007, the Collier Preserve (formerly known as the “Mill Creek Preserve”), consists of 303-acres located along Western Reserve Road in Boardman Township (Mahoning County, Ohio). The Collier Preserve hosts a wide array of habitat types including tall-grass prairie, wooded ravines, reverting fields, and perhaps most notably the eastern portions of the property are dominated by emergent and forested wetlands, some identified as category 3 (highest quality). Public access at this facility is restricted to a primitive, but extensive trail system which allows for various form of passive recreation such as hiking, birding, photography, etc.

Sawmill Creek Preserve

Acquired in 2002, the Sawmill Creek Preserve consists of 155-acres along South Turner Road in Canfield Township (Mahoning County, Ohio). The Sawmill Creek Preserve is primarily dominated by hardwood forest; however, several areas can be characterized as emergent wetland, or intermediate shrub/scrub brush. Public access at this facility is restricted to a primitive, but extensive trail system which allows for various form of passive recreation such as hiking, birding, photography, etc.

Mill Creek Wildlife Sanctuary

Acquired partially in 2004 and in 2022, the Mill Creek Wildlife Sanctuary consists of 482-acres along Calla Road in Beaver Township (Mahoning County, Ohio). The Mill Creek Wildlife Sanctuary is primarily dominated by emergent wetlands and open water ponds, however, several areas include hardwood forest and early successional grasslands. Public access at this facility is restricted on the western side of Mill Creek, allowing access by permit only for approved activities such as birding or photography. The eastern portion of the facility is open to the public but currently lacks any formal amenities for public access such as a parking area or trails.

Springfield Forest

Acquired in 2021, the Springfield Forest consists of 89-acres along Springfield Road in Springfield Township (Mahoning County, Ohio). As a result of previous mining activities on the property, the Springfield Forest is dominated by intermediate successional shrubs and small trees, with some limited areas of mature hardwoods and early successional hardwoods. This facility is open to the public, with a parking lot, fishing pier, and a partially improved trail system to allow for various form of passive recreation such as hiking, fishing, birding, photography, etc.

Hawkins Marsh

Acquired in 2022, the Hawkins Marsh consists of 161-acres along W. Western Reserve Road in Smith Township (Mahoning County, Ohio). The Hawkins Marsh is primarily dominated by mature hardwood forest with large areas classified as forest wetland (category 3). This facility is open to the public but currently lacks any formal amenities for access such as a parking area or trails (scheduled for installation in 2023).

Vickers Nature Preserve

Acquired in 1993, the Vickers Nature Preserve consists of 264-acres located on Akron-Canfield Road (U.S. Route 224) in Ellsworth Township (Mahoning County, Ohio). Vickers Nature Preserve is primarily dominated by hardwood forest, but some areas of early successional grassland, emergent wetland, and an open water pond are present. Public access at this facility is restricted to a partially improved and extensive trail system which allows for various form of passive recreation such as hiking, fishing, birding, photography, and unique to Vickers Nature Preserve, equestrian trail riding.

Huntington Woods

Huntington Woods consists of 383 acres located directly south of U.S. Route 224 in Boardman Township. Huntington Woods is dominated almost exclusively by dense hardwood forest, with some areas of forested wetland present within the extensive floodplain of Mill Creek. This facility is not open to the public as currently there are no parking lots or trail systems to facilitate access.

Hitchcock Woods

Hitchcock Woods consists of 665-acres located along Hitchcock Road in Boardman Township (Mahoning County, Ohio). Hitchcock Woods is comprised almost entirely of dense hardwood forest, with some areas of forested or emergent wetland present within the extensive floodplain of Mill Creek. Public access at this facility is restricted to a primitive trail loop which allows for various form of passive recreation such as hiking, birding, photography, etc.

Mill Creek Park

Established in 1891, Mill Creek Park is considered Ohio's First Park District and consists of approximately 1600 acres located north of U.S. Route 224 in Boardman Township and the City of Youngstown (Mahoning County, Ohio). Mill Creek Park is highly developed, with interspersed natural areas consisting of hardwood forest, emergent wetlands, and several open water lakes and ponds. Mill Creek Park is highly accessible to the public including both active and passive recreation such as golf, fishing, jogging, biking, hiking, organized sports, etc.

Appendix D: Controlled Hunt Program Structure





Controlled Hunting Program: Structure

- All controlled hunting opportunities will be by permit only.
- Permits will be issued through a lottery drawing conducted by the ODNR: Division of Wildlife (ODOW).
- A \$3.00 fee will be collected by ODOW at the time of application to cover administrative costs associated with conducting the lottery.
- All applicants must meet the minimum participation standards set forth by the ODOW, including a valid hunting license and either-sex deer permit.
- At the time of permit award, hunters will be assigned a hunt unit, hunters may not actively pursue game outside of their assigned hunt unit.
- Hunt units are established on a facility-by-facility basis based upon existing site conditions.
- Controlled hunting opportunities will be archery only, unless otherwise noted – where deemed safe by ODOW and MCMP, select regional facilities will have separate firearm hunting opportunities.
- Permit periods for selected hunters will be 1-week in length throughout the regular archery season (late September – early February), with separate permit periods at select facilities for firearm hunting opportunities.
- All facilities will remain open to the public during archery only permit periods and select facilities will be closed to the public during firearms hunts.

Controlled Hunting Program: Rules and Regulations

- All applicable hunting regulations set forth by the Division of Wildlife must be adhered to at all times.
- All applicable MetroParks Rules and Regulations must be adhered to at all times.
- Permits must be visibly displayed on the vehicle dashboard when accessing a hunt unit.
- A physical or digital copy of the permit must also be carried by the hunter and any guest while actively hunting.
- Permitted hunters may bring one (1) guest per day during their permit period.
- Only white-tailed deer may be harvested as part of this controlled hunt.
- Hunters and their guest may each harvest (1) antlered deer assuming they have not previously harvested an antlered deer in the same hunting season (only 1 antlered deer permitted statewide regardless of harvest method/location per ODOW regulations).
- Hunters and their guests may each harvest antlerless deer utilizing either Deer Management Permits or Either-Sex Tags purchased from the ODOW.
- Antlerless deer harvested with Deer Management Permits as part of a controlled hunt do not count towards a hunter's county bag limit as described by the ODOW.

- Hunters are encouraged to harvest antlerless deer to effectively reduce overall population levels.
- Allowable equipment will be any weapon defined as legal method of take by the ODOW for the respective season.
- Hunter orange must be worn during all firearm controlled hunts and shall include wearing a vest, coat, jacket, or coveralls that are either solid hunter orange or camouflage hunter orange as described by ODOW.
- No hunting shall be permitted within areas defined as “No Hunting Zones” – these areas vary in size and location for each facility.
- No hunting shall be permitted within 300’ of any MetroParks property boundary directly adjacent to residential areas.
- No hunting shall be permitted within 100’ of any established pedestrian trail.
- Hunting structures such as portable treestands and ground blinds are permitted within designated hunt units during any given permit period.
- All hunting structures must be removed at the end of each permit period.
- All hunting structures left unattended on MCMP property must be tagged with the owner’s name and phone number – any untagged structures or those left onsite after the hunter’s permit period has ended will be removed and confiscated by the MetroParks.
- All elevated structures must be in good working order and be manufactured according to current industry standards – no homemade structures will be permitted.
- All hunters must use an appropriate fall restraint device when hunting from an elevated position.
- No treestand, climbing method, and/or accessory equipment shall cause injury or damage any tree on MetroParks property – screw in steps/gear holders, climbing spikes, etc. are strictly prohibited.
- No trees, limbs, brush, and/or other vegetation located on MCMP property shall be injured in any way.
- Baiting will not be permitted on any MetroParks Property.
- No motorized vehicles of any kind are permitted on MetroParks properties beyond the designated parking areas.
- Hunters may not pursue wounded game on to private property without written permission of the landowner.
- Hunters may not utilize private property to access their hunt unit without written permission of the landowner.
- Harvested deer must be removed from MetroParks property in their entirety, excluding entrails which may be left onsite, near the harvest location – no dumping of entrails and/or carcasses in/near designated parking lots will be permitted.
- The disposal of any trash, litter, or other debris is not permitted on MetroParks property including hunt units and/or designated parking areas.

- Hunters may only park in the designated parking area(s) assigned to their permit.
- Parking areas are first come first serve; hunters may not park in such a way to obstruct normal ingress/egress to the facility.
- Hunters are permitted to access their hunt units between the hours of 5am – 10pm, unique circumstances requiring access outside of these times will be reviewed on an individual basis. Hunters may only actively pursue game within legal shooting times as described by the ODOW.
- Hunters are not permitted to harvest any deer exhibiting a unique color phase (albino, piebald, melanistic, etc.).
- **In addition to ODOW game check requirements, all harvested deer must be reported to the MetroParks Natural Resources Manager at the end of each permit window via email at nderico@millcreekmetroparks.org or by phone at 330.702.3000 x136.**
- Failure to abide by any of the rules and regulations listed above will result in the immediate revocation of your controlled hunting permit and you will not be permitted to participate in future controlled hunting opportunities at the MetroParks. Appropriate law enforcement action will be taken if required by MCMP Police and/or the County Wildlife Officer.

Mill Creek MetroParks Contact Information

MetroParks Police Department
810 Glenwood Avenue
Youngstown, OH 44502
330-744-3848

Nick Derico, Natural Resources Manager
7574 Columbiana Canfield Road
Canfield, OH 44406
330-702-3000x136
nderico@millcreekmetroparks.org

Hunt Unit Descriptions

Hitchcock Woods (Archery Only)

- Hunt Unit: 489 Acres
- 5 – Permits per Period

Huntington Woods (Archery Only)

- Hunt Unit: 223 Acres
- 2 – Permits per Period

Mill Creek Wildlife Sanctuary

- Hunt Unit: 422 Acres
- 4 – Archery Permits per Period
- 3 – Firearm Permits per Period

Collier Preserve

- Hunt Unit: 162 Acres
- 3 – Permits per Period

Springfield Forest

- Hunt Unit: 82 Acres
- 2 – Archery Permits per Period
- 1 – Firearm Permit per Period

Hawkins Marsh

- Hunt Unit: 128 Acres
- 2 – Permits per Period

Vickers Nature Preserve

- Hunt Unit: 225 Acres
- 3 – Permits per Period

Sawmill Creek Preserve

- Hunt Unit: 128 Acres
- 3 – Archery Permits per Period
- 2 – Firearm Permits per Period

MetroParks Farm

- Hunt Unit: 50 Acres
- 1 – Permits per Period

Total Hunt Unit Acreage = 1,942

Total Archery Permit Periods = 8 (16 at Hitchcock & Huntington Woods)

Total Archery Permit Holders per Period = 25

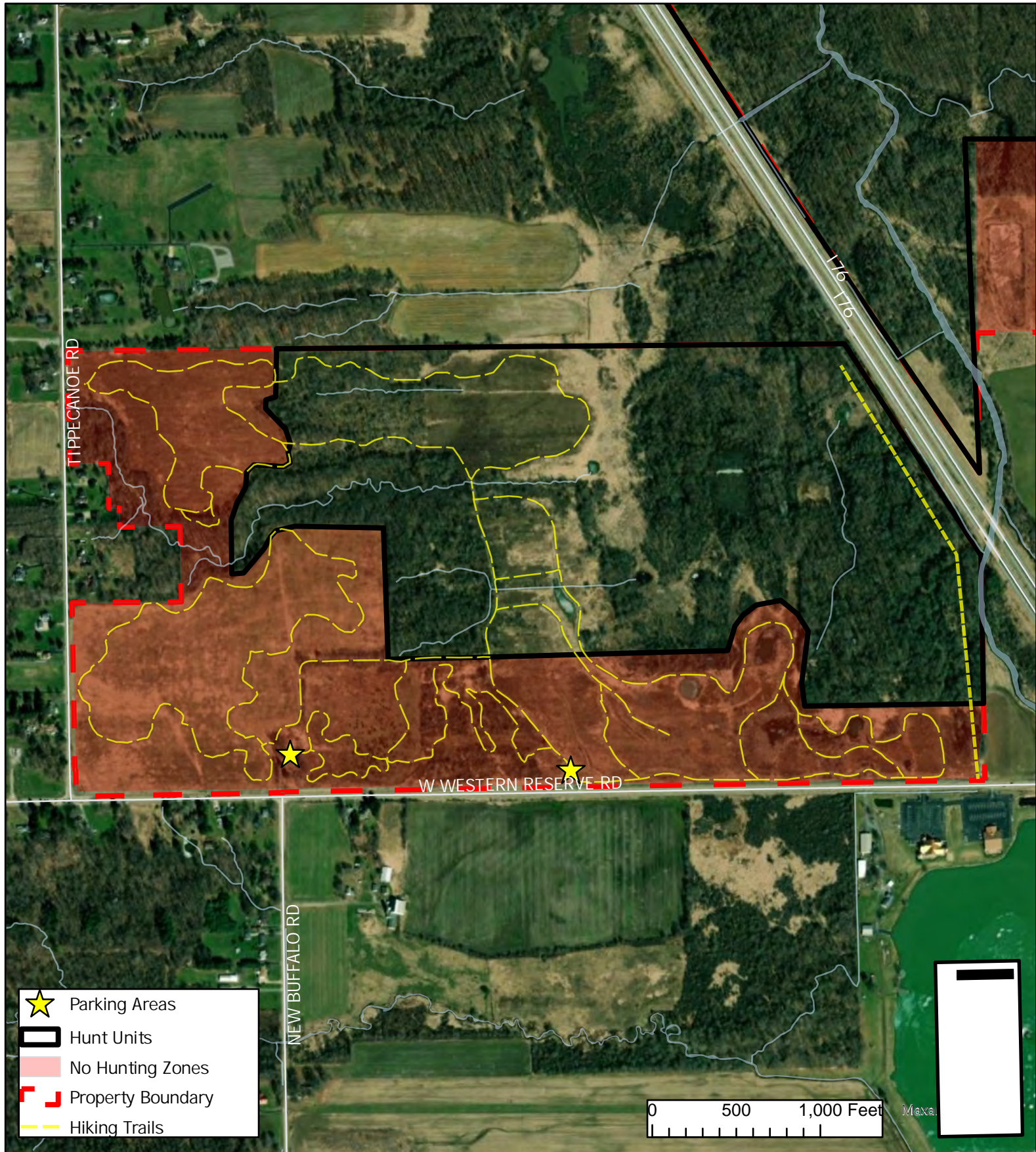
Total Archery Permit Holders per Season = 256

Total Number of Firearm Permit Periods = 5

Total Firearm Permit Holders per Period = 15

Total Number of Firearm Permit Holders per Season = 75

Total Number of Permit Holders per Season = 331

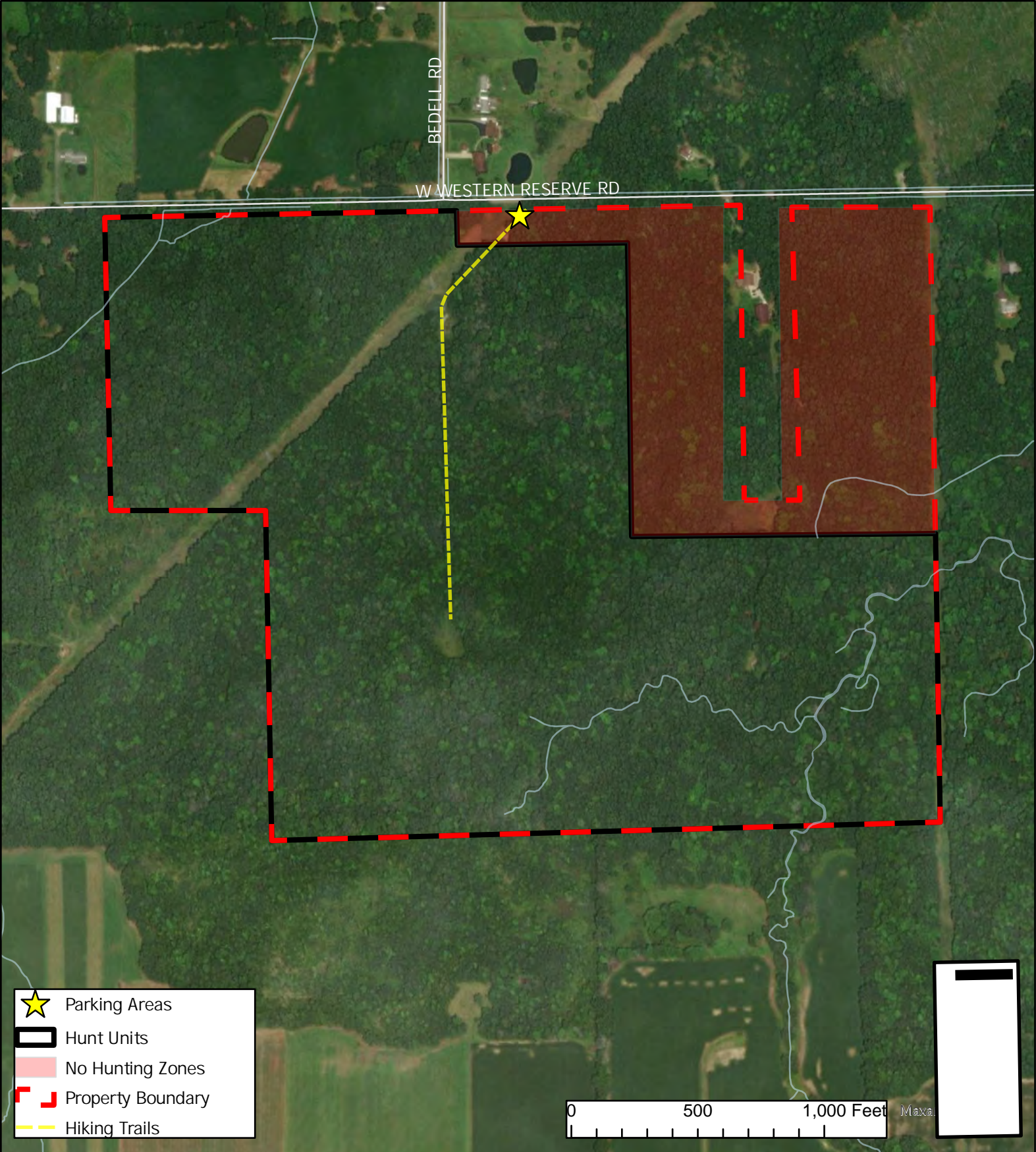


No Hunting May Take Place Within 100' of Any Established Pedestrian Trail

No Hunting Within 300' of Any Property Boundary Adjacent to Residential Areas

Collier Preserve
Hunt Units
Boardman Township
Mahoning County, Ohio





- ★ Parking Areas
- ▬ Hunt Units
- ▭ No Hunting Zones
- ▬ Property Boundary
- ▬ Hiking Trails

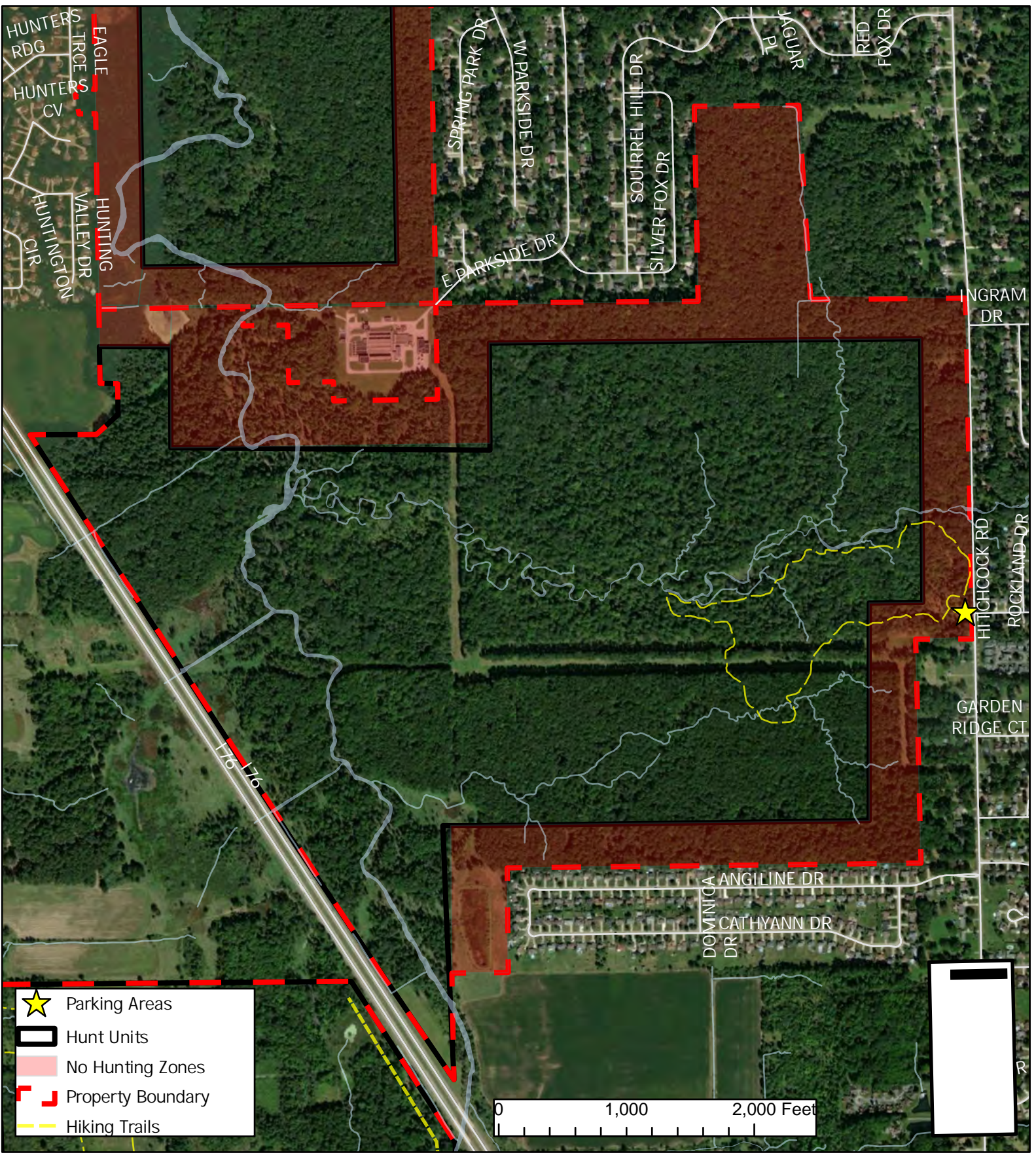
0 500 1,000 Feet Max.

No Hunting Within 100' of Any Established
Pedestrian Trail

No Hunting Within 300' of Any Property Boundary
Adjacent to Residential Areas

Hawkins Marsh
Hunt Units
Smith Township
Mahoning County, Ohio



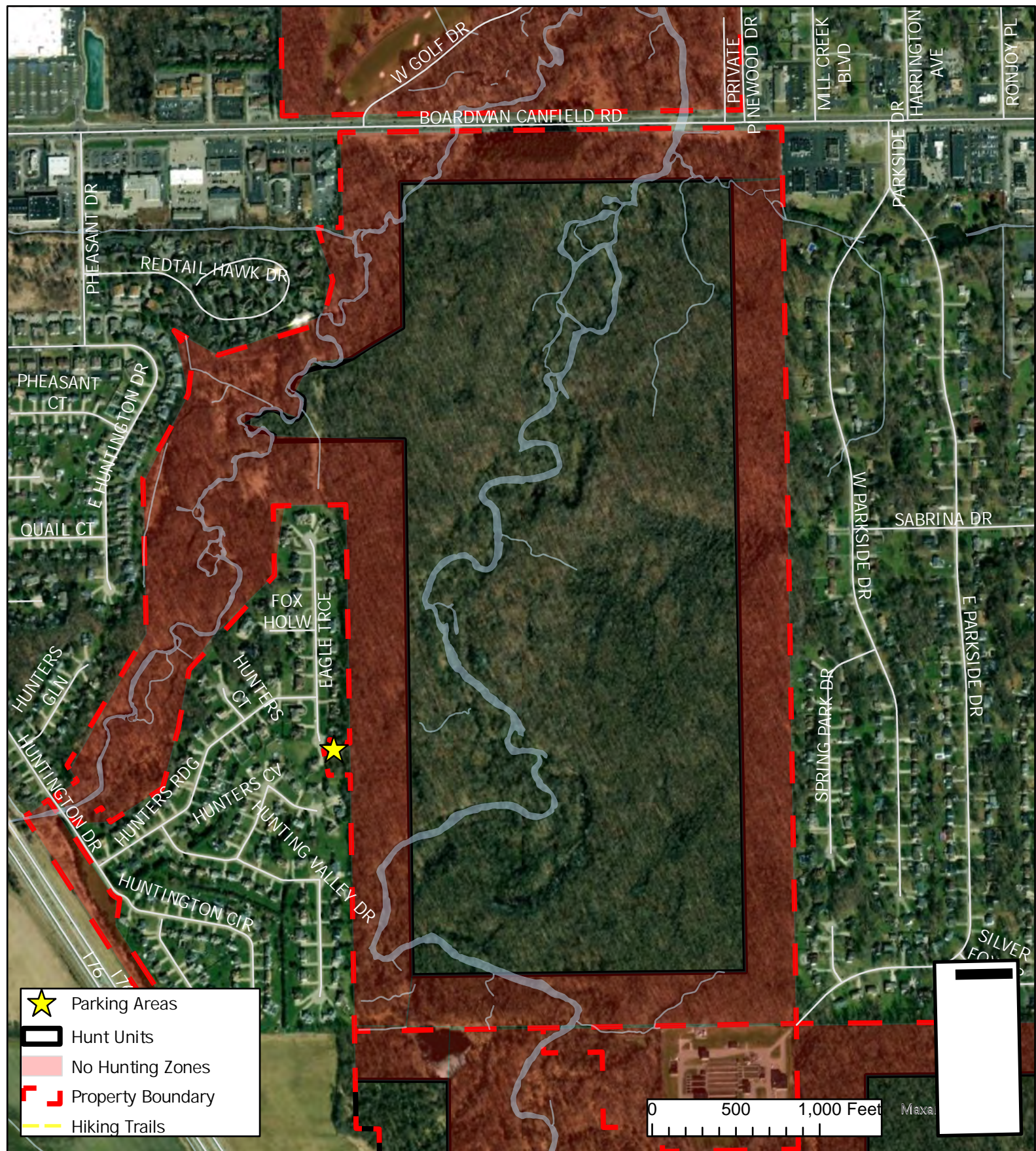


No Hunting Within 100' of Any Established Pedestrian Trail

No Hunting Within 300' of Any Property Boundary Adjacent to Residential Areas

Hitchcock Woods
Hunt Units
Boardman Township
Mahoning County, Ohio



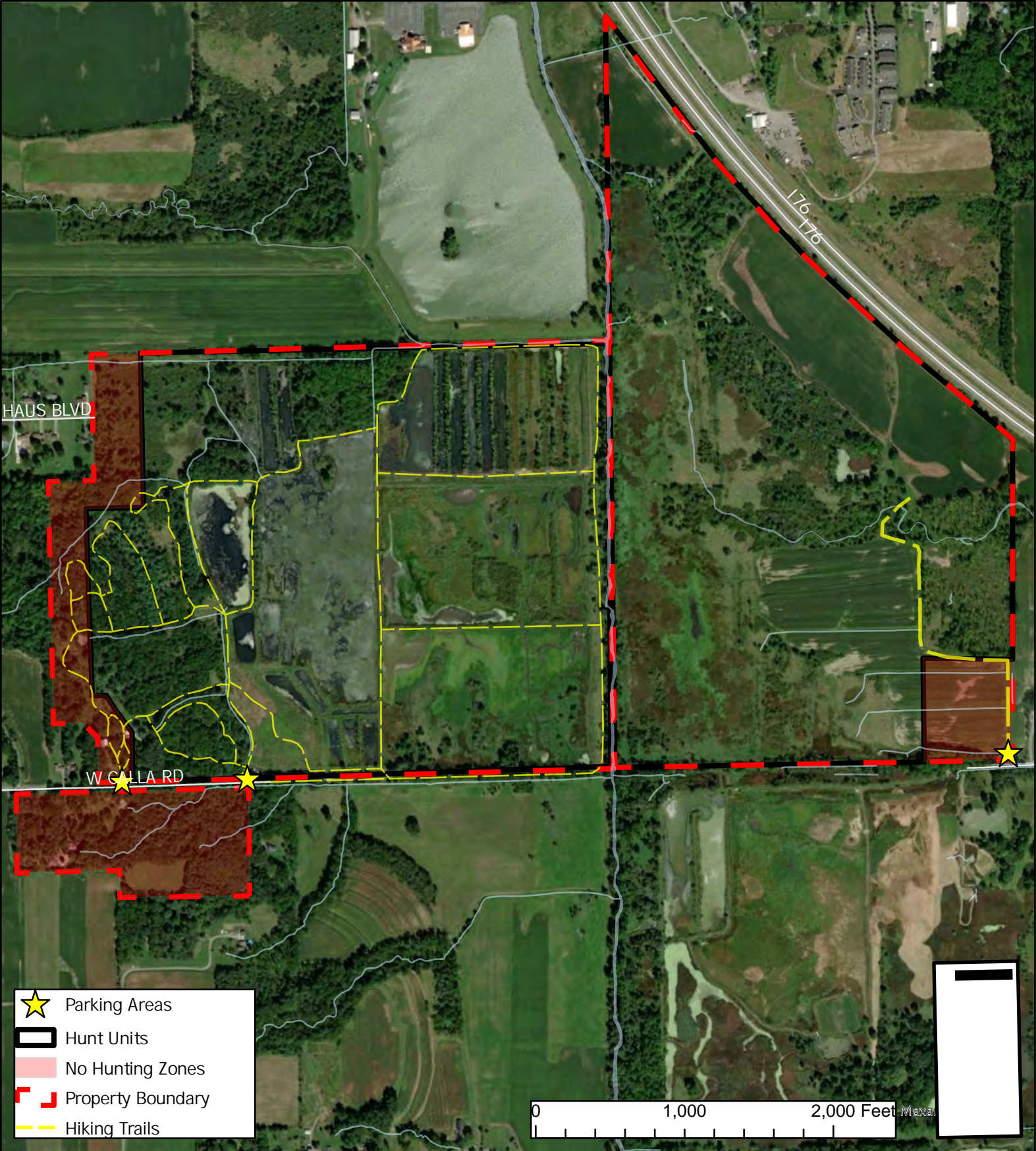


No Hunting May Take Place Within 100' of Any Established Pedestrian Trail

No Hunting Within 300' of Any Property Boundary Adjacent to Residential Areas

Huntington Woods Hunt Units Boardman Township Mahoning County, Ohio



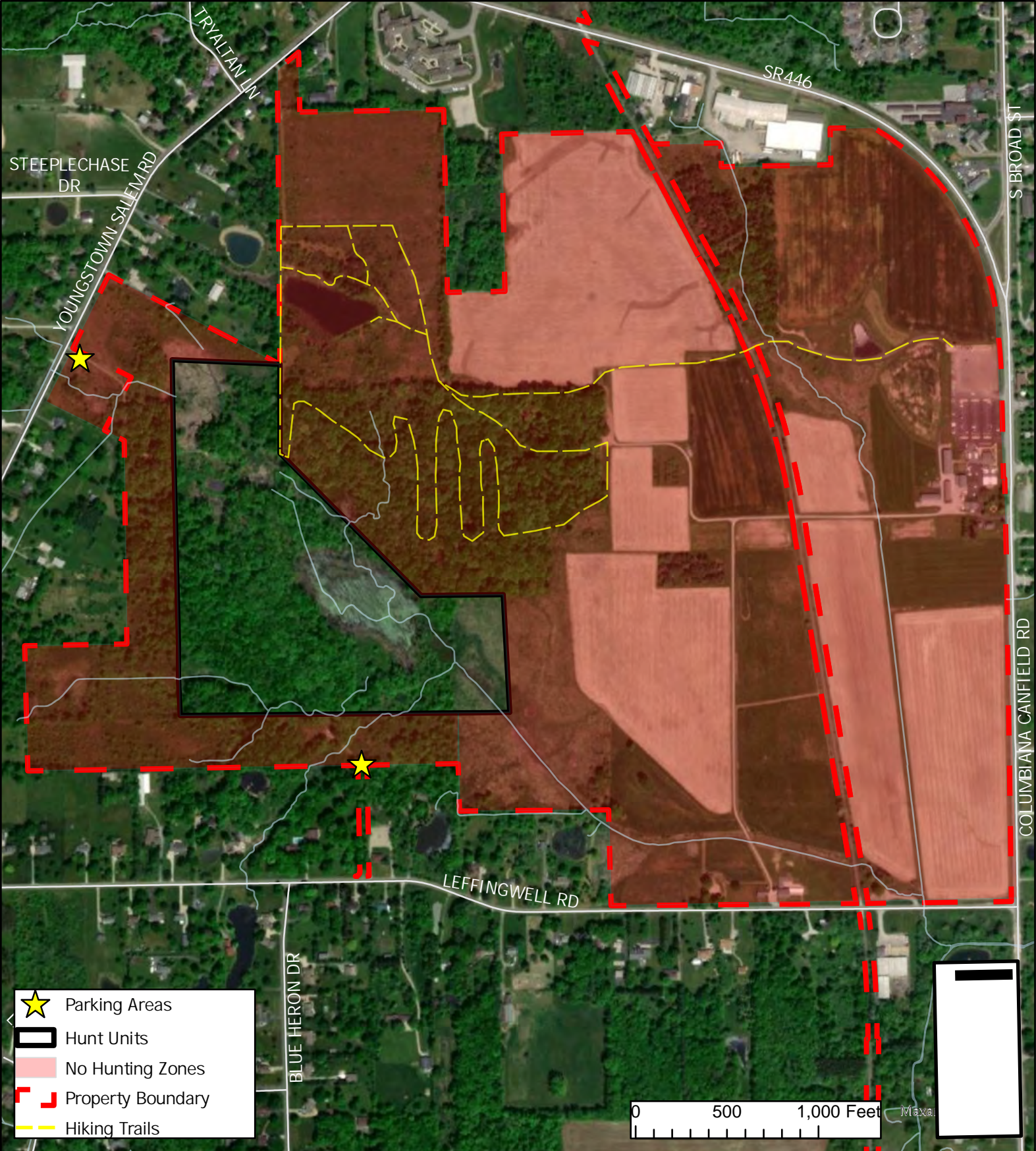


No Hunting May Take Place Within 100' of Any Established Pedestrian Trail

No Hunting Within 300' of Any Property Boundary Adjacent to Residential Areas

Mill Creek Wildlife Sanctuary
Hunt Units
Beaver Township
Mahoning County, Ohio



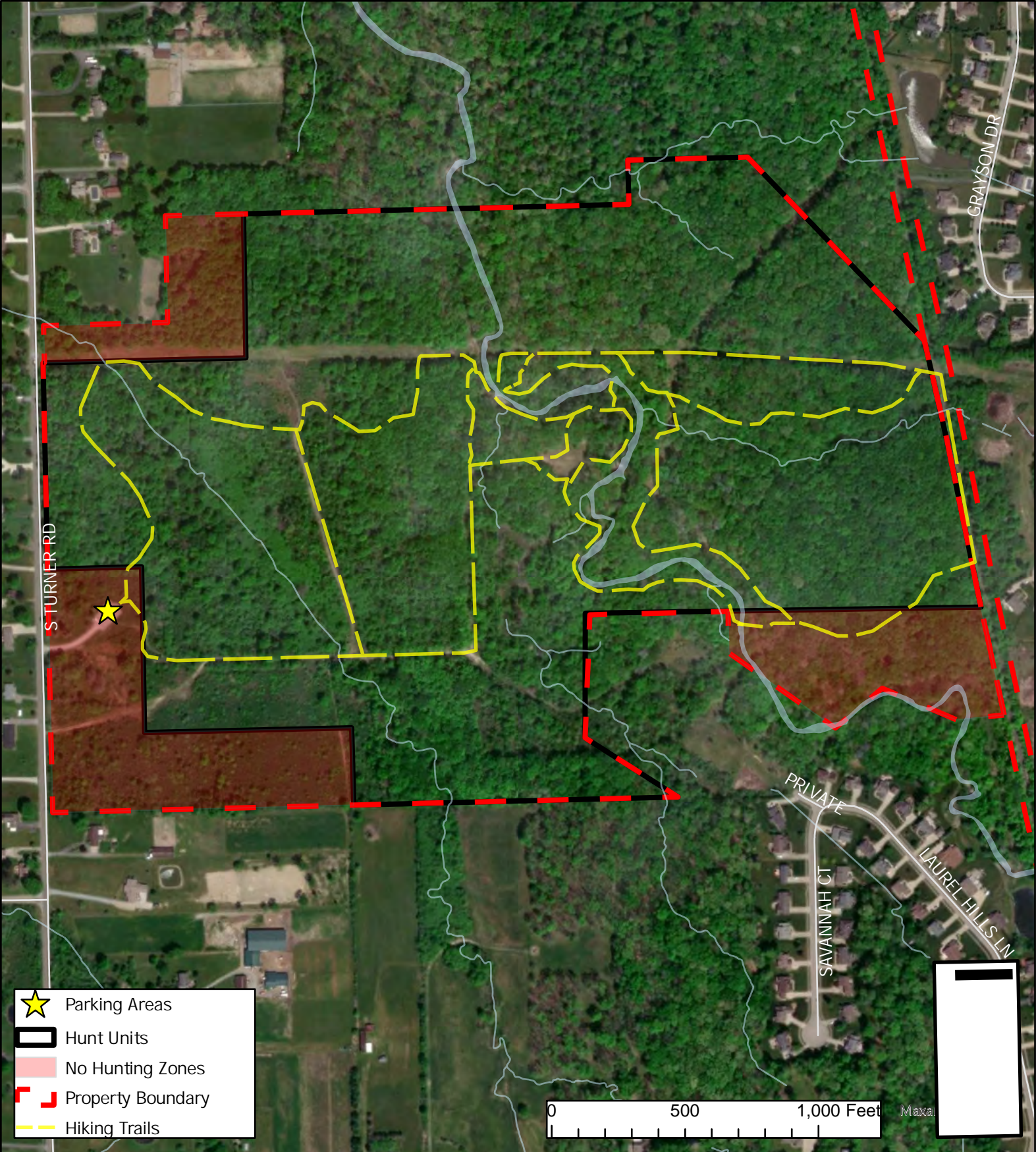


No Hunting May Take Place Within 100' of Any Established Pedestrian Trail

No Hunting Within 300' of Any Property Boundary Adjacent to Residential Areas

MetroParks Farm
Hunt Units
Canfield Township
Mahoning County, Ohio



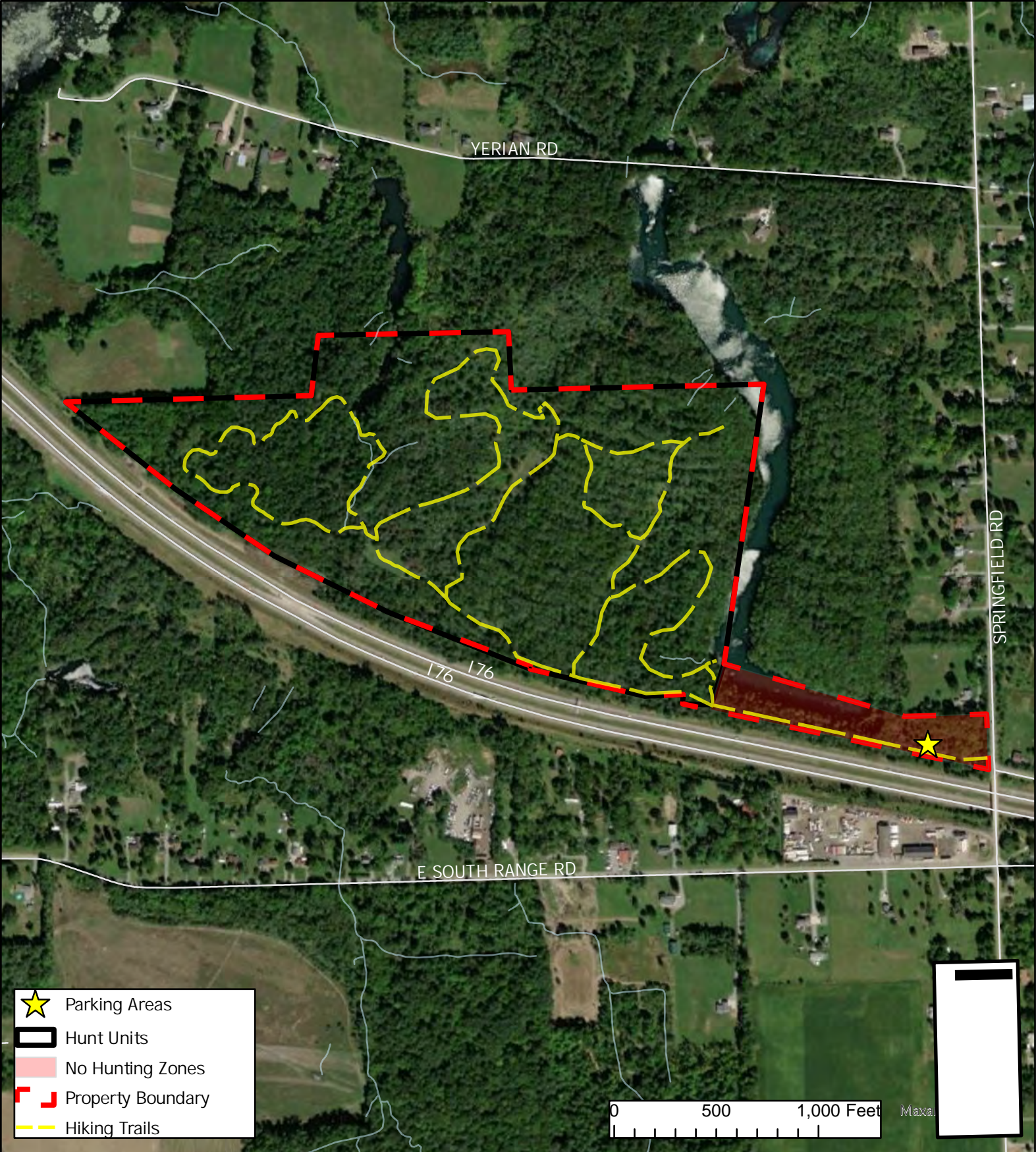


No Hunting May Take Place Within 100'
of Any Established Pedestrian Trail

No Hunting Within 300' of Any Property
Boundary Adjacent to Residential Areas

Sawmill Creek Preserve
Hunt Units
Canfield Township
Mahoning County, Ohio



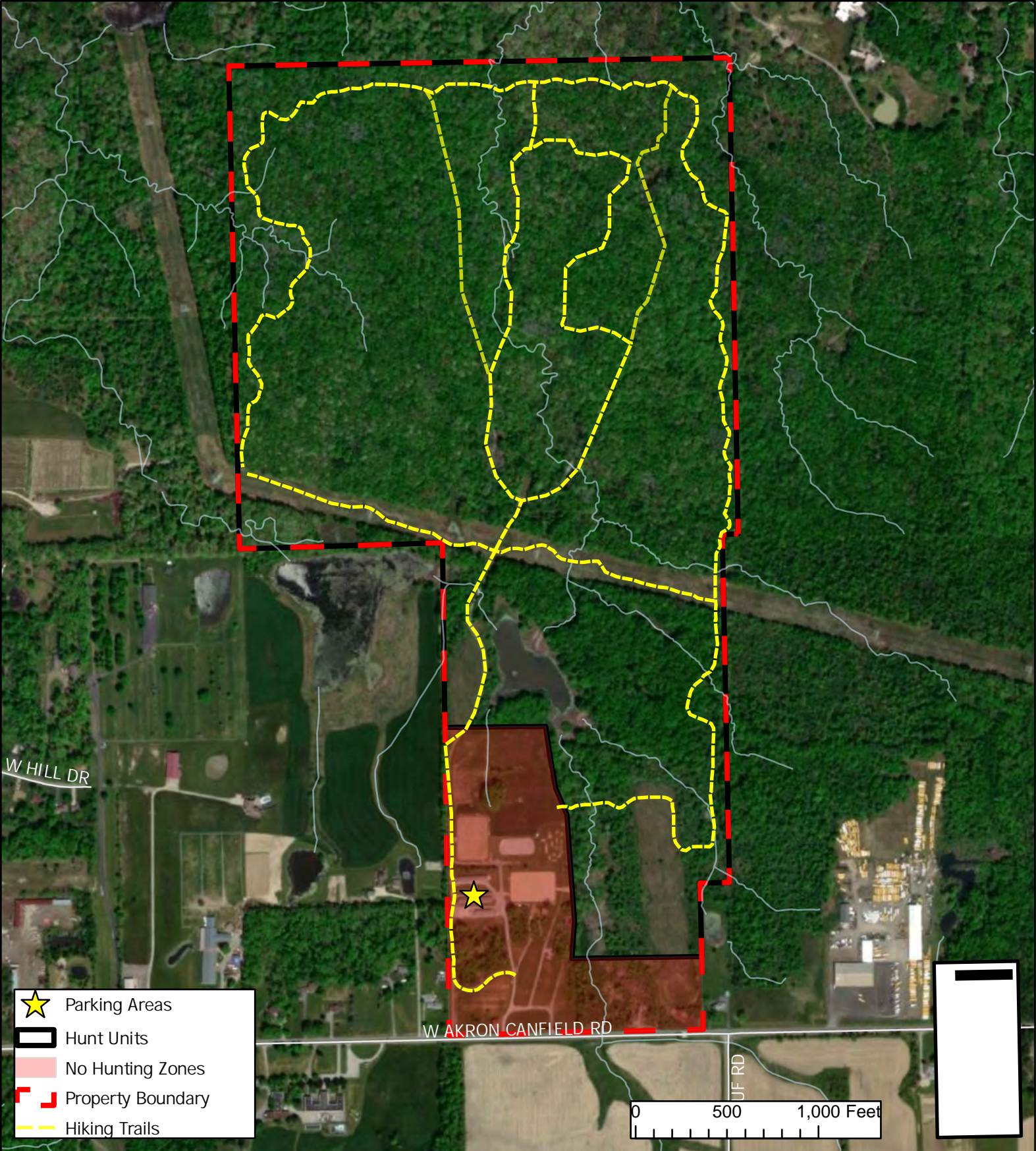


No Hunting May Take Place Within 100'
of Any Established Pedestrian Trail

No Hunting Within 300' of Any Property
Boundary Adjacent to Residential Areas

Springfield Forest
Hunt Units
Springfield Township
Mahoning County, Ohio





No Hunting May Take Place Within 100'
of Any Established Pedestrian Trail

No Hunting Within 300' of Any Property
Boundary Adjacent to Residential Areas

Vickers Nature Preserve
Hunt Units
Ellsworth Township
Mahoning County, Ohio



Appendix E: Browse Preference of Regional Plant Species



Deer Browse Preference of Plant Species Found Within MCMP

This document does not represent the entire catalog of flora found within Mill Creek MetroParks but is meant to highlight native species and their invasive counterparts that are found within MetroParks properties and the relative deer browse preference for that species.

In general, MetroParks properties are experiencing very little regeneration of native deciduous or coniferous tree species. Additionally, where present, the suite of understory shrubs are dominated primarily by unpalatable invasive species or deer-resistant natives such as common privet, glossy buckthorn, Japanese barberry, ironwood, or hawthorn. The same could be said for wildflowers and forbs, with unpalatable invasive species or deer-resistant natives such as common teasel, Canada thistle, daffodils, wingstem, Virginia bluebell, Christmas fern, or jack-in-the-pulpit being among the species most observed.

Distinct browse lines, a lack of forest regeneration (even in non-preferred species), and the dominance of unpalatable or deer-resistant shrubs and forbs all suggest that the forest ecosystems of Mill Creek MetroParks are being shaped by the heavy browse pressure of white-tailed deer, resulting in decreased biodiversity and habitat degradation.

<u>Deciduous Tree Species</u>	<u>Category</u>	<u>Browse Preference</u>
Northern Red Oak	Native	High
White Oak	Native	High
Swamp White Oak	Native	High
Sugar Maple	Native	High
White Ash	Native	High
Red Maple	Native	Moderate
Pin Oak	Native	Moderate
Black Walnut	Native	Moderate
Tulip Poplar	Native	Moderate
Black Cherry	Native	Moderate
Bitternut Hickory	Native	Moderate
Hawthorn	Native	Moderate
Norway Maple	Invasive	Moderate
Shagbark Hickory	Native	Low
Ironwood	Native	Low
American Sycamore	Native	Low

American Beech	Native	Low
Slippery Elm	Native	Low
Tree of Heaven	Invasive	Low

<u>Evergreen Tree Species</u>	<u>Category</u>	<u>Browse Preference</u>
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White Pine	Native	High
Eastern Hemlock	Native	High

<u>Shrub Species</u>	<u>Category</u>	<u>Browse Preference</u>
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Canada Yew* (Potentially Threatened)	Native	High
Black Chokeberry	Native	High
Dogwood spp.	Native	High
Greenbrier	Native	High
Multiflora Rose	Invasive	High
American Elderberry	Native	Moderate
Honeysuckle spp.	Invasive	Moderate
Autumn Olive	Invasive	Moderate
Buttonbush	Native	Low
Spicebush	Native	Low
Common Chokecherry	Native	Low
Ninebark	Native	Low
American Holly	Native	Low
Common Privet	Invasive	Low
Glossy Buckthorn	Invasive	Low
Japanese Barberry	Invasive	Low

<u>Wildflower/Forb Species</u>	<u>Category</u>	<u>Browse Preference</u>
Large White Trillium	Native	High
Red Trillium	Native	High
American Cancer Root	Native	High
Jacob's Ladder	Native	High
False Solomon's Seal	Native	High
Canada Mayflower	Native	High
Goldenseal	Native	High
Cut Leaved Toothwort	Native	High
Virginia Bluebell	Native	Low
Daffodils	Introduced	Low
Dutchman's Breeches	Native	Low
Jack-in-the-Pulpit	Native	Low
Mayapple	Native	Low
Christmas Fern	Native	Low
Blue Phlox	Native	Low
Wingstem	Native	Low
Common Milkweed	Native	Low
Purple Coneflower	Native	Low
Tall Ironweed	Native	Low
Wild Leek	Native	Low
Garlic Mustard	Invasive	Low
Skunk Cabbage	Native	Low
Black-eyed Susan	Native	Low
Woodland Sunflower	Native	Low
Common Teasel	Invasive	Low
Canada Thistle	Invasive	Low
Cardinal Flower	Native	Low

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