

Brief: Parks Canada eradication of deer on Sidney Island, British Columbia

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Parks Canada has embarked on a \$5.9M eradication project of all deer from Sidney Island. The island is 20% Parks Canada land, with the remaining 80% private, organized as a bare land strata. The bulk of the work is to **remove deer from the private portion** of the island.

In December 2023 Parks Canada executed Phase 1 of their project. This resulted in the killing of 84 deer at a total cost to date of over \$2 million: \$1.17M in project planning and a Phase 1 budget of \$834,000 for aerial shooting and ground hunting using **imported contract hunters with semi-automatic weapons with extended magazines**, and numerous other exemptions to both federal and provincial hunting regulations.

Phase 2, scheduled for next summer, fall, and winter, will include a significant further spend to erect fencing - dividing the island into 40 hectare plots - and then track down the few remaining deer using more foreign hunters and dogs, as well as local labor for fence contracting. This, and some effort to remove invasive plants, will consume the remainder of the \$5.9M project budget. **Phase 2 must not be allowed to proceed.**

Between 2010 and 2022, Parks Canada produced multiple iterations of a plan to eradicate Fallow Deer from Sidney Island in the Southern Gulf Islands, near Victoria, BC. Fallow Deer, introduced over 100 years ago, are viewed by Parks as “invasive” and have been blamed for reduced biodiversity on the island. Native Black tail deer are also on the island. The project calls for killing all of the deer to ensure that they have killed all of the Fallow Deer. This is because specially trained imported dogs that they plan to use can't distinguish between Fallow and Black tail deer.

The Phase 1 result of only 84 deer shot can only be described as a huge embarrassment. Worse, of those 84 only 66 were the target species of Fallow Deer. The cost per deer killed so far is staggering: nearly \$24,000 per deer, and \$30,000 per Fallow Deer. This funding has come at the cost of many other ecological restoration activities and projects in the Parks Canada network this past year and next, for a primarily private island.

With so few deer, why has this project ever proceeded? Key data has been ignored. The bare land Strata Corporation adjacent to the Park was fully formed in 2005. In 2008, the owners recognized that there was a problem of too many deer on the island and through a combination of a deer capture facility, paid cull hunting, and annual owner/guest hunting, drastically reduced the population of deer. This self funded on-the-ground work was proceeding all through the years that Parks continued to start and restart its project proposal. The very low number of deer killed In Phase 1, using professional sharpshooters in a helicopter and on the ground, confirms what an analysis of the strata hunt committee's results has always showed. The owner efforts reduced the population from an estimated high of 2,000 animals to less than 300 (and probably less than 200) by the time the Parks project finally got underway.

What should be done now? **To avoid further embarrassment, Parks should acknowledge how few deer there are and cancel Phase 2.** An updated professional study should be commissioned to confirm the ecology is continuing to rebound. The last effort, put out by UBC in 2019, showed a 30% recovery in many key plants even though there was only a partial reduction in the number of deer throughout the study period. Together with a proper count of the remaining deer, a baseline for future herd management will be established. This can be used to set targets for the ongoing annual hunting program by the Strata owners in cooperation with Parks on their 20% of the island. The ongoing ecological recovery can be monitored regularly as well to ensure continued improvement. This will remove the concern expressed by Parks of the number of deer rebounding. Since 2008, this has never happened and there is no reason that it ever should.

Parks Canada has spent 12 years developing a project that became unnecessary because of the work done by the Strata Corporation. **It is time to cut losses and develop a new partnership to manage the island as a whole.**