Starting this fall, deer will be hunted on Loch Raven Reservoir property as part of an effort to winnow down a population that county, Baltimore City and state officials say is too large.

"This is part of (County Executive) Jim Smith's sustainability plan," said John Markley, manager of finance administration for the county Department of Environmental Protection and Resource Management. Markley spoke on behalf of David Carroll, the county's director of sustainability and former department director.

Carroll, who has been working with the city on a deer-management strategy for the better part of two years, was unavailable for comment due to a death in his family. The city owns the reservoir, which includes parcels in Cockeysville, Timonium and Towson, as well as Phoenix and Glen Arm.

Two weeks ago, Democratic Sen. Jim Brochin, who represents the Towson area, and Republican Councilman Bryan McIntire, who represents much of the area to the north and east of Loch Raven Reservoir, advocated a managed hunt in a meeting with city Deputy Mayor Christopher Thomaskuty.

The county plans to hold at least one community meeting in the first half of August to explain the program to area residents. Markley said there will be opportunities for community input but said it is unlikely the managed hunt will be canceled.

Enid Feinberg, a Phoenix resident and one of three founding members of deersolutionsmd.com, said she was disappointed at the prospect of a hunt on reservoir property.

"If this wasn't so sad, it would be comical," she said.

Environmentalists brought in recently by Feinberg could find no evidence of damage caused by deer in wooded areas around the reservoir, she said. She also questioned the need for a hunt based on claims of overpopulation.

"There's no proof that we need this," she said. "There's no scientific data."

The reservoir will likely be open to bow hunters sometime this fall. County officials indicated that the bow hunting probably will be combined with the use of an outside contractor to "sharpshoot" deer on reservoir property.

Baltimore City manages three reservoirs in the county — Liberty, Loch Raven and Prettyboy.

Kurt Kocher, a spokesman for the city Department of Public Works, said his agency has "been facing an extremely serious problem with the deer population at Loch Raven for years."

Complaints from residents about property damage, vehicle accidents involving deer and animals crashing into stores have been well documented, Kocher said.

An even bigger concern is the damage an unchecked deer population can do to the area's water supply, he said.

"Deer are devastating to new growth needed for a healthy forest," Kocher said. "They are eating everything in sight, and that means you have old trees and not much to replace them. Without the trees, you have runoff that fills the reservoir with sediment, thus reducing our total water capacity."

Kocher said the overpopulation is also a danger to other animals living in the area.

Last year, Goucher College used contractors for a controlled hunt on it's 287-acre Towson campus.

Specific areas of the 11-square-mile reservoir property that will be hunted have not been identified.
In March, county officials used a police helicopter to do a deer census using radar in the reservoir and at Oregon Ridge Park.

Markley said a forest can reasonably sustain 10 deer per square mile. County surveys found there were 67 and 83 deer per square mile respectively in Oregon Ridge Park and the reservoir.

"There's absolutely no possibility that the deer population, through magic or some trick of nature, decreased," said Paul Peditto, state director of wildlife and heritage services in the Department of Natural Resources.

The newest reservoir number is more than double the finding of a 1999 state survey.

The hunt could begin as early as the Sept. 15 in what would be the first of five seasons, Peditto said.

In this region, the state allows bow hunters to take an unlimited number of antlerless, or female, deer during bow seasons.

"That forces the hunters to focus on the part of the population responsible for the over-population," Peditto said.

Prettyboy and Liberty have allowed bow hunting of deer for 35 years, according to Kocher.

A hunt at Loch Raven Reservoir would likely be similar to what is done at those reservoirs.

Kocher said Prettyboy and Liberty are different from Loch Raven "because they are away from the more densely populated areas. Loch Raven is almost downtown Towson, so there is a much higher conflict area with deer and people."

Peditto said he believes the hunt will have little impact on residents or visitors to the reservoir.

"For decades we've been doing the exact same thing in Liberty and Prettyboy successfully, without safety issues and completely compatible with recreational users," Peditto said.

Bryan P. Sears is political editor of Patuxent Publishing Company's Baltimore County newspapers.

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