

# SOUTH WESTERN REGION METROPOLITAN PLANNING ORGANIZATION

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December 10, 2007

Governor M. Jodi Rell  
Office of the Governor, State Capitol  
210 Capitol Avenue  
Hartford, Connecticut 06106

**Subject: Lyme Disease**

Dear Governor Rell:

In our role as chief elected officials of Connecticut municipalities that are badly affected by Lyme disease and deer overpopulation, we appeal to you for help. Many of us are struggling with the issue of how best to alleviate the consequences of excess deer. Our member towns are all situated in Fairfield County, the county with the highest number of Lyme cases in the nation. Some have a true incidence of over 2% of residents getting a new case of Lyme disease every year according to the CDC data for 2005.

All of our towns belong to the regional Fairfield County Municipal Deer Management Alliance that has been working for the last 4 years to develop regional approaches to the problems of excess deer numbers. This Alliance now recognizes that this effort could benefit from attention at the state level.

The State has effectively promoted the aggressive control of mosquito populations in order to combat West Nile Disease, but has not yet shown an equivalent effort to prevent Lyme disease. Much attention has focused on the controversies surrounding diagnostic tests and duration of treatment of Lyme but very little on prevention.

This far more common vector transmitted infection can have severe long term consequences for those who contract it. Often difficult to diagnose, untreated Lyme disease can have serious cardiac, arthritic and disabling neurological consequences. In addition, the newer emerging tick borne diseases can have more serious acute consequences such as liver failure.

We feel that more factual information in the public realm would help this effort, knowing that useful scientific studies have been performed and their results could be more widely distributed on a statewide level.

For example, the fact that communities in Maine, Massachusetts and Connecticut have been able to dramatically reduce their tick populations, and Lyme disease rates, by reducing their deer populations would be a powerful, and yet straightforward fact to add to the state Department of Public Health's Lyme prevention educational material.

Furthermore our own Connecticut Agriculture Experiment Station's tick expert, Dr Kirby Stafford, states that "deer are key to the reproductive success of the ticks" and that "reducing deer densities to below 10 to 12 per sq mile has been shown to substantially reduce tick numbers and human Lyme disease". These statements should be available in the DPH Lyme prevention materials, so that people will understand the huge benefits of a deer reduction program.

At present these data are buried in esoteric scientific journals or handbooks with no direct link from the DPH web site and not easily accessible to the public. Even some of our own local health departments are unaware of these studies, and therefore unable to help educate the residents of our towns.

While the CT Department of Environmental Protection has made noble attempts to respond to the terrible increase in deer numbers over the last 30 years, they are struggling to make any real inroads.

The Chief of Wildlife has stated that this is due to lack of public understanding of the need to reduce the deer herd significantly and the slowly dwindling number of hunters in the state; in more developed towns, public attitudes to hunters are still focused on hunting being a sport, and they have yet to see hunters as our partners in the battle against Lyme disease and woodland destruction. Public awareness programs could help change this perception.

The Centers for Disease Control (CDC) data and studies indicate that the true number of new, physician confirmed Lyme disease cases was between 29,000 to 59,000 in Connecticut alone in 2006. Public health is perhaps the most important reason to control deer numbers, but DPH confines its preventive advice to personal avoidance of ticks-- which is all but impossible and has demonstrably failed to end or even diminish the threat of Lyme disease.

However, if the state would set a policy direction and coordinate the work of these two agencies on getting more information out to the public and setting a tick borne disease prevention goal to be implemented by DEP, then DEP could do a much more effective job at helping our communities avoid the diseases spread by deer ticks.

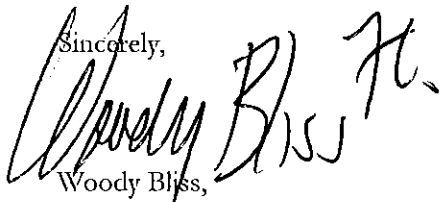
These illnesses are affecting too many of our residents, and excess deer are having a significant economic impact on our communities through lost work days and increased health care costs, not to mention the costs of landscape damage, fencing, deer repellants, tick sprays and automobile accidents.

Furthermore, the environmental damage being wrought by deer is an ongoing tragedy in our more rural towns, where we see the ecological value of our native woodlands degraded by deer over browsing and loss of native species, while invasive plants are spread by the deer themselves.

Our health officers do not know whether to encourage children to run through the woods and explore nature, or to stay home and avoid picking up ticks outdoors. Obviously the ideal would be to be able to tell parents that the woods are now safe again, the ticks are gone and the wildflowers and birds are returning, so go on out and enjoy nature, Can you help us achieve this goal before the current generation of children have grown old?

We respectfully ask that you take a leadership role, as you have done for West Nile Disease, in raising public awareness of the preventable nature of Lyme and with the appropriate State Agencies to combat Lyme disease in the State of Connecticut.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Woody Bliss". The signature is written in a cursive, somewhat stylized font. To the right of the name, there are some initials or a mark that looks like "H".

Woody Bliss,  
Chairman and First Selectman of Weston

**South Western Region MPO**  
**Letter to Governor Rell Re. Lyme Disease**  
**December 10, 2007**  
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Copies:

The Hon. Evonne Klein., First Selectwoman, Darien  
The Hon. Peter Tesei, First Selectman, Greenwich  
The Hon. Jeb Walker, First Selectman, New Canaan  
The Hon. Richard Moccia, Mayor, Norwalk  
The Hon. Dannel P. Malloy, Mayor of Stamford  
The Hon. Gordon Joseloff, First Selectman, Westport  
The Hon. William Brennan, First Selectman, Wilton  
Mr. Louis Schulman, Administrator, Norwalk Transit District  
Mr. Bud Titsworth, Commissioner, Westport Transit District  
Dr. Floyd Lapp, Executive Director, SWRPA  
Ms. Sue Prosi, Senior Regional Transportation Coordinator, SWRPA