
IN THE BEGINNING Oh, dear. Where are the eastside deer?

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Talk about being displaced from your old neighborhood.

Erie's industrial-urban deer have left the former International Paper Co. south-yard site, and the neighbors who've been watching and feeding them for years aren't happy about it.



The site owner, Greater Erie Industrial Development Corp., and the Pennsylvania Game Commission say the deer simply took off to parts unknown after GEIDC spent about \$1.3 million to clear the land and do other remediation work under orders from the state Department of Environmental Protection.

"We don't want anybody to think the deer were shot or harmed in any way," said Monica Brower, chief executive of the Economic Development Corp. of Erie County, which also directs GEIDC. "It's not our intent to cause them any harm, but we're required to do the work there to get it ready for industrial use."

The 63-acre south yard is being cleared now, from East Lake Road south to East 10th Street, east to Downing Avenue. Deer have also been seen for years in the adjacent Dunn Brickyard area, from East 10th to 12th streets west of Downing, and that 24-acre site will be cleared starting in the spring, Brower said.

But for Mary Wierzbicki, her friends, neighbors, and even her 89-year-old mother, the question lingers: Where did the deer go?

The small herd, which Wierzbicki described as "semi-tame," could be frequently seen at a partially fenced-in portion of the property near East 10th Street. Many local residents fed the animals and enjoyed watching them, she said.

But in recent weeks, as work crews cleared trees and brush from the property, the deer disappeared.

Larry Smith, a wildlife conservation officer with the Game Commission, said the answer is simple -- the deer simply left the area when the trees, brush and weeds they once used for cover were ripped away.

"Sometimes you could see 10 of them at a time over there," said Wierzbicki, 57, a lifelong resident of the neighborhood around the former paper plant.

She grew up on East Sixth Street in the plant's shadow, and now lives in the 1000 block of East 10th Street.

Wierzbicki said she frequently took her mother, Louise Jorgensen, to the area to feed and watch the deer. Both enjoyed seeing deer so frequently in an urban setting, she said.

"I'm not the only one who's been wondering," she said. "People miss seeing them."

Smith said the deer frequented that area because "it provided them some cover" and because people fed them there.

"There's not a lot of food for them naturally over there," Smith said. "People would put food there and encourage them to stay there. We tried to discourage that."

Smith also said deer frequently move about the city.

"They're all around," he said. "I've responded to a doe outside the (Erie County) Courthouse giving birth to twins. A doe at Dobbins Landing. Because of the fence sections near the road (in the IP south yard), people perceived these animals like they were in a zoo pen. They weren't. There's openings in the fences that let them come and go."

Carl Fetzner, a Lawrence Park resident who frequently watched the deer, is also curious about what happened to the animals.

"I didn't think they could get out of there," Fetzner said. "I thought it was all fenced in. My concern is that if they did get out, they could be running around getting into traffic."

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