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Rochester Hills tops in deer wrecks

Data show Oakland, Livingston drivers are in biggest hot spots

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Rochester Hills, southeast Michigan's perennial champ in car-deer crashes, was tops again in 2007, and Debrah Zatina can understand why.

She fatally nailed a deer that darted in front of her Jeep Wrangler Sept. 21 on Tienken near Rochester Road. Zatina wasn't injured, but her Jeep sustained hundreds of dollars in damage.

"It came out of nowhere," Zatina said. "I couldn't stop. It was traumatic."

The Southeast Michigan Council of Governments reported Monday that there were 6,280 vehicle-deer crashes in the seven-county region last year, down from 6,358 in 2006 but up from 6,097 in 2005. The crash data are collected annually by Michigan State Police.

Car-deer crashes are a long-term problem that SEMCOG attributes to business and residential development in once-rural areas and to a statewide deer herd that has grown fourfold since 1970. In southeast Michigan, the herd has grown tenfold over that period.

Oakland County led the region in the number of vehicle-deer crashes at 1,876, or 5% of all crashes in the county in 2007. By comparison, the number of car-deer collisions in Livingston County, 1,157, accounted for 21.4% of all crashes in that county.

Capt. Michael Johnson of the Oakland County sheriff's substation in Rochester Hills said the city's growth squeezed deer out of their habitat. "It's a shame," he said.

The community has banned deer hunting since the 1970s, allowing the deer population to explode. Earlier this month, the City Council banned the feeding of deer in an effort to control the population and cut the number of crashes.

Officials also have talked about hiring sharpshooters or enacting a temporary hunting season to thin the herd. Rochester Hills has at least 1,000 deer and last year, 219 were in car wrecks.

*For more information, go to www.semco.org. Contact **MATT HELMS** at driving@freepress.com.*