

FIRE ISLAND NATIONAL SEASHORE DEER MANAGEMENT PLAN – FAQ’s

WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THE DEER MANAGEMENT PLAN?

The purpose of the White-tailed Deer Management Plan and Environmental Impact Statement (plan/EIS) is to develop a deer management strategy that:

1. Protects, preserves, and restores native vegetation and other natural and cultural resources at the Seashore, including the globally rare Sunken Forest, other maritime forests at Carrington, Talisman, Blue Point, and Watch Hill/Wilderness; and, to maintain the historic landscape at the William Floyd Estate.
2. Promotes public understanding of the complex relationship between deer and Seashore resources, including the built environment.
3. Reduces undesirable human-deer interactions.

WHY DO WE NEED TO MANAGE DEER ON FIRE ISLAND?

Unfortunately the deer herd on Fire Island has negatively impacted our resources to the point that it is a threatened system that is now seriously out of balance. Because there are no natural predators for deer on Fire Island, the Island is over browsed, low lying bird habitat is being destroyed, and historical plantings are ravaged.

The primary goal of the management plan is to reduce the size of the deer herd, thereby reducing such damage and allowing plants and vegetation to regenerate. Reducing the dominance of the system by one resource (the deer population) will help us preserve the other equally valuable Island resources as well.

In addition to resource degradation, there is also a problem posed by “conditioned” deer, i.e. animals conditioned, or attracted to, a particular reward, such as food. Food-conditioned deer may approach humans or look for food in the communities, especially during winter. Deer considered “habituated” are those more accustomed to the presence of non-threatening humans and who tend not to flee.

WHY ARE HUMAN-DEER INTERACTIONS A PROBLEM?

1. Studies conducted in 2007 by Siemer et al. and Leong and Decker interviewed and surveyed participants (Fire Island community residents and Willian Floyd Estate) about the types of deer impacts they experience. The studies found:
 - The primary concerns were related to impacts associated with the deer population size and density, home range and movements, and behavior.
 - Impacts on residents include damage to landscaping and gardens; concerns about disease and ticks; sanitation issues; wildlife viewing opportunities;

concerns about deer health; and interactions with pets; but also include concerns about impacts on deer such as habitat loss and behavior changes.

- In addition, research revealed a high level of public concern about these topics, and a majority of residents on Fire Island and almost half of residents in nearby communities on Long Island either worried about deer-related problems or did not enjoy deer at the Seashore (Siemer et al., 2007).
2. Over the years, the deer have become habituated to humans and conditioned to human food. This has led to human-deer interactions such as deer approaching humans, people intentionally feeding deer, people unintentionally feeding deer via unsecured garbage or ornamental plants, and interactions between deer and pets. These interactions are viewed as undesirable by the Seashore because they raise the risk of injury to people and deer and increase the likelihood of property damage by deer.

WHAT MANAGEMENT OPTIONS ARE INCLUDED IN THE PREFERRED ALTERNATIVE D?

Alternative D calls for the following management options:

1. Improved education and outreach on the purposes and goals of deer management on Fire Island
2. Enhanced deer and vegetation monitoring
3. Fencing of the historic core at the William Floyd Estate (approximately 80 acres)
4. Fencing in the Sunken Forest (approximately 44 acres of maritime holly forest)
5. Direct reduction of the herd using a combination of sharpshooting (on NPS properties), capture and euthanasia of individual deer (where appropriate), and public hunting (within the Fire Island Wilderness only) to achieve the plan objectives (estimated at 20-25 deer per square mile)
6. The option for fertility control to maintain deer density **when a fertility control agent which meets NPS criteria becomes available.** *(Note: these criteria may be found in the Final Deer Plan/EIS on pages 39-41, and more information on the development of these criteria may be found in Appendix E on page E-8.)*

WHO SELECTED ALTERNATIVE D?

The plan was developed by the National Park Service (NPS) in cooperation with the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (NYSDEC), U.S. Department of Agriculture – Animal and Plant Health Inspection Services (USDA), and with public involvement. The NPS team responsible for developing the plan, which included science, policy, and wildlife management experts from across the agency, identified the preferred alternative.

WHY WAS ALTERNATIVE D CHOSEN OVER THE OTHER POSSIBLE ALTERNATIVES?

FINS advises that the choice of Alternative D was based on many factors:

1. It provides flexibility and management options to meet the key management objectives within the desired timeframe.
2. It responded to public concerns regarding safety and resource management, and also met the NPS statutory and regulatory responsibilities
3. It had the best chance of being implemented, given uncertain economic conditions and funding sources.

WHAT WAS THE PUBLIC PARTICIPATION PROCESS? CAN PUBLIC COMMENTS ON THE PLAN STILL BE SUBMITTED?

The period of public involvement in the planning process is now over.

- Two public scoping periods were held during the Deer Management Plan/EIS process. An initial scoping period was open in summer 2011. The Draft Plan was available for public and agency review from July 31, 2014 through October 10, 2014. During this comment period 1,631 pieces of correspondence were received.
- All comments were read and considered in shaping the Final Deer Plan/EIS. Those determined to be substantive are explicitly addressed by the NPS response provided in the Comment Analysis Report, available in Appendix E of the Final Deer Plan/EIS.
- At this point in the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) process, public comments on the Final Deer Plan/EIS are no longer being solicited. *[More information on the NEPA process may be found in the Citizen's Guide to the National Environmental Policy Act at: https://ceq.doe.gov/publications/citizens_guide_to_nepa.html.]*

WHAT IS THE "30-DAY NO ACTION PERIOD"? WHEN WILL THIS PLAN BE IMPLEMENTED?

1. The 30-day no action period is part of the National Environmental Policy Act process and allows for the agency's own internal review of the plan prior to final action on the proposal.
2. The Final Deer Plan/EIS has yet to be approved by the NPS Northeast Regional Director through publication of a Record of Decision. Once the Record of Decision is signed, the document is final.
3. More specific information about how the plan is to be implemented will be contained in the Record of Decision. When the Record of Decision becomes available, it will be announced to the public through local media.
4. Funding proposals have been submitted to support management actions set forth in the plan. But given the uncertainty of obtaining the necessary resources, no specific implementation timeline has been developed. For the time being, FINS will continue to

support its deer education and outreach efforts, as well as current deer and vegetation research and monitoring efforts.

WILL THERE BE ANY SHARPSHOOTING OR HUNTING IN THE COMMUNITIES?

There will be no direct reduction of the herd (i.e. hunting or sharpshooting) within the Fire Island communities. It is against the law to shoot or hunt within 500' clearance area from any human populated area of Fire Island.

- 1. A public hunt is proposed only within Fire Island Wilderness, not within any other Seashore property.** A public hunt would abide by the NYS-DEC hunting season and regulations. The Seashore would be responsible for managing the public hunt and may limit the number of hunters and the hours available for hunting. The use of both bow hunting and firearms could be allowed, as dictated by the state deer hunting seasons. [Final Deer Management Plan/EIS, page 52]
- 2. Sharpshooting has only been proposed on federal lands within Fire Island National Seashore and at the William Floyd Estate.** Sharpshooting would involve the use of qualified federal employees, contractors, or skilled volunteers with demonstrated expertise and training in the implementation of successful wildlife and deer management actions (including firearms handling, direct removal techniques, carcass processing, and wildlife capture and handling) The meat from these deer would be provided directly from the meat processing facility to a local food bank or food pantry for the purpose of redistribution for human consumption.

HOW WILL THE ISSUE OF FOOD-CONDITIONED DEER IN THE FIRE ISLAND COMMUNITIES BE ADDRESSED?

The Final Deer Management Plan/EIS includes a range of tools to reduce undesirable human-deer interactions, including education and outreach, and coordination with community officials and boards, landowners, and vacationers.

These components were included in all of the alternatives analyzed in the Deer Management Plan/EIS because education and Park-community collaboration will be critically important in reducing undesirable human-deer interactions.

HOW DOES THE PLAN ADDRESS THE ISSUE OF TICK-BORNE DISEASE?

The transmission of tick-borne diseases is a major public health concern and one best addressed through education and prevention of tick bites. The transmission cycle of Lyme disease is complicated and involves a range of small mammal hosts in addition to white-tailed

deer. This issue is not addressed by the Deer Plan/EIS because it is complex and involves more than just deer.

WHY ISN'T FERTILITY CONTROL THE ONLY MANAGEMENT TOOL BEING CONSIDERED?

As described in the plan, FINS cannot use fertility control as a management strategy until there is a fertility control agent available that: (1) has been shown to be highly effective on free-ranging populations; (2) minimizes negative impacts on the animal (i.e., reproductive and social behaviors); and (3) is both state registered and federally approved for use.

In addition, if there were an acceptable fertility control agent currently available, it would take ten years or more to achieve a deer density that provides the greatest protection of Seashore resources.

WHY ISN'T PZP AN ACCEPTABLE FERTILITY CONTROL AGENT?

While the fertility control agent PZP was used as part of a scientific study on Fire Island and showed mixed results, neither PZP nor any other fertility control agent currently meet the following NPS criteria for use:

1. Federally approved and state-registered for application to free-ranging white-tailed deer populations.
2. Provides multiple-year (three or more) efficacy (80%–100%)
3. Can be administered through remote injection to avoid capturing the animal on a regular basis and to increase the efficiency of distribution.
4. Leaves no harmful residual in the meat (meat would be safe for human and non-target animal consumption).
5. Has minimal impact on deer behavior (e.g., reproductive behaviors, social behaviors, out of season estrous cycling).