



National Park Service  
U.S. Department of the Interior

Rock Creek Park  
Washington, DC

## Rock Creek Park White-Tailed Deer Management Plan



## Environmental Impact Statement

## Public Scoping Meeting

National Park Service  
U.S. Department of the Interior  
Rock Creek Park  
3545 Williamsburg Lane, NW  
Washington, D.C. 20008

# You're Invited!

## Your Participation Will Help Meet the Objectives

Your participation is vital to our planning process. Because of your interest in Rock Creek Park, we are requesting your input in developing the White-tailed Deer Management Plan/Environmental Impact Statement. More detailed information will be available at public meetings about the plan.

Updates will be provided on the EIS at [www.nps.gov/rocr](http://www.nps.gov/rocr).

Comments can be submitted electronically at: <http://parkplanning.nps.gov/rocr>

Comments can also be submitted to:  
Superintendent  
Rock Creek Park  
3545 Williamsburg Lane, NW  
Washington, DC 20008

Please be sure to include your full name and address with the comments so we may add you to our mailing list for information on future items in this process.

## Scoping Meetings

Scoping is the first step to involve the public in the environmental impact analysis process. Because the environmental impact statement will analyze many complex ecological and social issues, your participation is encouraged and needed.

*Public Scoping Meeting*  
Wednesday, November 1 and  
Thursday, November 2, 2006  
6:00 pm to 9:00 pm  
Rock Creek Nature Center  
5200 Glover Road, NW  
Washington, DC 20015

The Rock Creek Nature Center is conveniently located near the intersection of Military Road and Glover Road.



## Purpose of and Need for Taking Action

The purpose of the White-tailed Deer Management Plan and EIS (plan/EIS) is to develop a deer management strategy that supports long-term protection, preservation, and restoration of native vegetation and other natural and cultural resources within the park.

Action is needed at this time to address:

- The potential of deer becoming the dominant force in the park's ecosystem, and adversely impacting native vegetation and other wildlife.
- A decline in tree seedlings caused by excessive deer browse and the ability of the forest to regenerate into the future.
- Excessive deer browse impacting the existing shrubs and herbaceous species.
- Deer impacts on the character of the park's cultural landscapes.

## Preliminary Alternatives

The following represent preliminary alternatives for deer management within the park:

- Alternative A - Existing Management Continued (No-Action Alternative)
- Alternative B - Reproductive Control
- Alternative C - Non-Lethal Combination
- Alternative D - Lethal Reduction with Firearms
- Alternative E - Lethal Reduction without Firearms
- Alternative F - Lethal Reduction followed by Non-Lethal Maintenance Measures

## Sustaining Forest Regeneration: A White-tailed Deer Management Plan at Rock Creek Park

The National Park Service (NPS) will soon begin preparation of the Deer Management Plan/EIS for Rock Creek Park. Through this planning process, the NPS seeks to focus its consideration of potential actions to determine deer population management options. This will allow protection of native vegetation and forest regeneration. The National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) will guide the plan and EIS along with NPS policy and related regulations.

## History of Deer Management at Rock Creek Park

Within eastern national parks, such as Rock Creek Park, landscapes have been managed to allow for the preservation and rehabilitation of scenic and historic lands. The result is a mixture of forest, shrub, and grassland, which constitutes excellent habitat for white-tailed deer. Since deer harvest has not traditionally been a component of management activities in the majority of parks including Rock Creek Park, the population of deer has greatly increased. Research has established that high deer numbers can have negative effects on plant and animal species.



*A deer browse line is evidence of deer impacts to vegetation.*

Rock Creek Park has relied on natural processes to manage deer populations. Deer were first sighted in the park in 1962. Observation cards were collected to document sightings, and these cards served as the only method for tracking deer in the park.

By the early 1990s, deer sightings were common place. Since then, deer population growth and density at Rock Creek Park has been measured through dead deer surveys, roadside spotlight surveys, distance sampling, limited aerial infrared surveys, and radio telemetry studies. The park has been conducting studies to determine the impact of deer on natural resources, especially vegetation. Studies conducted to date include open plot monitoring and fenced plot studies of deer browse on forest vegetation.

Rock Creek Park's staff also actively partakes in education and public outreach. The park assists D.C. Animal Control with injured deer, responds to neighbors' questions about deer population (e.g., how to keep deer out of yards, preventing browse of landscaping vegetation), and disseminates information about the deer population to the community including schools and the Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments.

## Park Research and Findings

The methods and protocols used to monitor vegetation impacts by deer and to determine deer populations have been modified or changed as the methodology and techniques improved with greater interest in deer impacts on trees and shrubs. Studies generally indicate a continual increase in the deer population within the park. In 2005, park staff estimated the number of deer in Rock Creek Park to be 50 per square mile, 2.5

times the desired number to maintain successful tree regeneration. Studies also indicate a substantial decrease in shrub cover, plant densities, and tree seedlings at locations throughout the park attributable to deer browse.

In 1990, long-term open vegetation plots were randomly located throughout the park to capture general changes in vegetation over time. Read

every four years, data from the open plots indicate in 2003, 28% of stems in plots were browsed, versus 2.9% in 1991. During this same time, shrub cover decreased 73% and tree seedlings in the open plots decreased.

In 2000, fenced plots or exclosures were paired with open plots throughout the park. Data collected from 2001 to 2004 showed that the plant numbers in the open plots for plants under 30 centimeters (12 inches) tall were 82% less and plants up to 100 centimeters (39 inches) tall were 50% less than the number of these plants in the fenced plots. These impacts can be directly attributed to deer browse and indicate deer are affecting the integrity of the understory structure and species composition, diminishing the value of habitat for other wildlife.



*The study of vegetation plots over time shows a decrease in shrub cover and seedlings.*