



WHITE-TAILED DEER AND VEGETATION MANAGEMENT PLAN / ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STATEMENT

# Public Scoping

Your participation will help shape this plan

The National Park Service (NPS) is preparing a Deer and Vegetation Management Plan and Environmental Impact Statement (plan/EIS) for Fire Island National Seashore (the Seashore). This plan/EIS will analyze a range of alternatives for managing deer to reduce their impacts on native vegetation, forest regeneration, cultural landscapes (such as the William Floyd Estate), and human-deer encounters at the Seashore. The National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), along with other laws, NPS policies, and related regulations, will guide the process in developing the plan/EIS.

The desired outcome of this plan is to ensure the continued integrity of the natural and cultural resources at Fire Island National Seashore while maintaining a white-tailed deer population within the Seashore.

Your participation is vital to our planning process. There are a number of ways to be involved throughout the process.

The first step in the process is called scoping. Scoping is an information gathering process, and we invite you to express your views on the information, issues, and alternatives that need to be addressed in the plan/EIS. We have also included questions at the end of this document for you to consider in your comments. Responses to these questions, as well as your other comments, will help us in framing the issues and alternatives used in this plan. The scoping period for this plan/EIS is currently underway and extends through July 24, 2011.



# Need for a Plan

## BACKGROUND

Over the last 40 years deer populations have increased at Fire Island. In 1974 Fire Island's deer herd was estimated at 50 individuals; by 1989 it was close to 500; and in 2003 it was estimated to be between 500 and 700. From population density studies over the past seven years it is estimated that 300 to 500 deer now live on Fire Island.

During this same period, studies at Fire Island's Sunken Forest have revealed a reduction in the number of plants and small trees in the understory, or ground level. This reduction in new growth coincides with the implementation of NPS wildlife protection policies and practices in the late 1960s and 1970s following the establishment of Fire Island National Seashore in 1964. Other areas within the park also exhibit impacts to vegetation.

In the late 1980s, the communities on Fire Island began voicing their concerns about the growing number of white-tailed deer. There were growing problems with physical encounters between residents and white-tailed deer, the browsing of residential plantings, and the increased prevalence of tick-borne diseases, including Lyme disease.

In 1993, a research project was initiated to determine if a contraceptive vaccine could be remotely administered and, if that vaccine could produce a measurable reduction in fertility among treated females. The last year of this long-term research project was 2009, and it appears that the research project resulted in some reduced deer densities within the Seashore. The plan/EIS will examine long-term solutions including continuation of the use of contraceptive vaccines as a feature of the alternatives.

Other research and studies have included:

- Deer population density studies
- Installation of passive deer baiting stations to test whether tick repellents could be effectively applied
- Interviews and surveys to better understand local experiences and perceptions of white-tailed deer and deer management
- Deer exclosures to determine regeneration potential of plants when deer were prevented from browsing areas
- Vegetation monitoring to determine the effects of browsing on native plants in rare habitats across Fire Island.

Extensive research has been conducted and information gathered about the role of deer at the Seashore. Some of this information is summarized above. More detailed background information about the project and deer at Fire Island is available at: <http://www.nps.gov/fiis/naturescience/deer.htm>.

## THE PURPOSE AND NEED FOR THE PLAN

The NPS needs to develop this plan/EIS to address issues associated with the abundance and distribution of white-tailed deer at the Seashore. The issues include impacts from white-tailed deer on the natural and cultural resources of the Seashore as well as impacts resulting from deer-human interactions.

Information collected at the Seashore has shown a need for a management plan to address changes in white-tailed deer abundance and behavior due to the following:

- Effects on native vegetation from deer browsing
- Effects on natural and cultural resources at the William Floyd Estate
- Habituation to humans
- Presence of human food sources



## PLAN OBJECTIVES

The NPS has developed some initial objectives for the plan/EIS. These objectives help define whether the plan will be considered a success. Objectives also help shape the range of alternatives for deer and vegetation management and set the framework for analysis. As part of the planning process these objectives may be modified based on feedback received during this public scoping period.



The objectives are to:

- Minimize adverse impacts of white-tailed deer on other native species and cultural landscapes.
- Create conditions for regeneration of the native vegetation in the Sunken Forest to retain the area in keeping with the provisions of the enabling legislation.
- Allow for the restoration of the cultural landscape of the William Floyd Estate.
- Reduce the potential for adverse impacts on human health and safety resulting from human-deer interactions, both within the communities and other areas of the Seashore.
- Improve resident and visitor understanding of the issues associated with high densities of white-tailed deer at Fire Island National Seashore, including human-deer interactions and impacts on the cultural and natural resources of the Seashore.

- Improve visitor understanding of deer/tick relationships throughout the Seashore, particularly at the William Floyd Estate.
- Support a white-tailed deer population in the Seashore that generally exhibits the natural behavior of wildlife.

## DEVELOPING THE ALTERNATIVES

The following strategies have been identified for possible use in developing the preliminary alternatives for this plan/EIS.

Individually, the strategies represent building blocks that may be used to form the preliminary alternatives.



Strategies Related to Managing White-Tailed Deer Browsing:

- White-tailed deer population management (e.g., fertility control, direct reduction, capture/euthanize, capture/relocate, public hunt)
- Protection of sensitive resources (e.g., fencing, use of repellent)
- Conditioning deer to change behavior

Strategies Related to Managing Deer-Human Interactions:

- Development of management practices for homeowners (e.g., vegetation lists for recommended landscaping plants, trash management)
- Public education
- Collaboration/education with local governments



# How to Comment

The NPS has developed questions that may assist you in thinking about the management of deer at Fire Island National Seashore. Please feel free to respond to these questions or provide other information that may help us as we prepare the plan/EIS.

1. What issues or concerns do you have about white-tailed deer or deer management at Fire Island National Seashore that the NPS needs to consider in preparing this plan?
2. Do the purpose, need, and objectives reflect what you think needs to be accomplished through this plan?
3. If not, what else do you think needs to be accomplished?
4. Are there strategies for deer and vegetation management, other than those presented, that you think should be considered?

You can provide comments electronically at:

<http://parkplanning.nps.gov/FireIslandDeerPlanScoping>.

Or, you can mail comments to:

Fire Island National Seashore  
Attn: Paula Valentine —  
Deer/Vegetation Management Plan  
120 Laurel Street  
Patchogue, NY 11772-3596

Before including your address, phone number, e-mail address, or other personal identifying information in your comment, you should be aware that your entire comment—including your personal identifying information—may be made publicly available at any time. While you can ask us in your comment to withhold your personal identifying information from public review, we cannot guarantee that we will be able to do so.

## HOW DOES THIS PROJECT RELATE TO THE GENERAL MANAGEMENT PLAN (GMP) BEING DEVELOPED?

This plan is being undertaken concurrently with the Seashore's general management planning process. GMP public scoping and data analysis supported the need for a deer and vegetation management plan. The content of the Deer and Vegetation Management Plan/EIS is being developed in coordination with development of the GMP and will be consistent with the approved final GMP.

## Schedule — Fire Island National Seashore White-tailed Deer and Vegetation Management Plan

The following schedule highlights important steps in the upcoming planning and environmental compliance process:

Notice of Intent to Prepare the Plan/EIS Published in the Federal Register	June 2011
Public Scoping Period Begins and Electronic Distribution of Scoping Newsletter ( <b>WE ARE HERE</b> )	June 2011
Public Scoping Period Concludes	July 2011
NPS Reviews Public Scoping Comments, Gathers Data, and Drafts Preliminary Alternatives	Fall 2011
Public Meetings to Discuss Preliminary Alternatives and Electronic Distribution of Preliminary Alternatives Newsletter	Winter 2012
Draft Plan/EIS to Public for Review and Comment (60 days) and Public Meetings	Spring 2013
Analysis of Public Comments	Summer 2013
NPS Publishes Final Plan/EIS	Winter 2014
NPS Prepares Record of Decision	Winter 2014