



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

Planning Process Update

In June of 2011, the National Park Service (NPS) began preparing a White-tailed Deer and Vegetation Management Plan/Environmental Impact Statement (Deer-Veg Plan/EIS) for Fire Island National Seashore (the Seashore). This Deer-Veg Plan/EIS will document existing conditions and analyze the environmental consequences of 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 interactions at the Seashore. The National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), along with other laws, NPS policies, and related regulations will guide the process for developing this Deer-Veg Plan/EIS.

The Seashore is in the process of developing a general management plan (GMP) that will guide the Seashore's overall management for the next 20 years. GMP public scoping and data analysis supported the need for a white-tailed deer and vegetation management plan. The Deer-Veg Plan/EIS is being developed to be consistent with the approved final GMP.

This newsletter, the second since the Deer-Veg Plan/EIS was begun, provides an update on the status of the Deer-Veg Plan/EIS; a summary of the public comments received during scoping; the statements of purpose, need, and objectives; and a review of the alternatives development process.



White-tailed deer within the Sunken Forest.

What has been accomplished so far

STATUS OF THE PLANNING PROCESS

After publishing a notice of intent (6/17/2011) to prepare the Deer-Veg Plan/EIS, the NPS conducted public scoping and encouraged interested parties to submit comments on the project. A summary of public comments received during this period can be found on page 3 of this newsletter.

Since September of 2011 the planning team has refined the statements of purpose, need, and objectives, and the preliminary alternatives presented in Newsletter #1 distributed during scoping. In addition, the planning team has:

- Completed a thorough review of the public comments received during scoping.
- Convened a science team to discuss the relevant science and data available related to key issues associated with the Deer-Veg Plan/EIS, including:
 - **Natural resource issues**, such as vegetation impacts in the Sunken Forest, William Floyd Estate, and other natural areas within the Seashore
 - **Social issues**, such as deer/human interactions within the communities, the availability of food and issues related to food conditioning, and the presence of ticks and tick-borne diseases in the communities and at the William Floyd Estate
 - **Cultural resource issues**, such as impacts on the cultural landscape at the William Floyd Estate

- Entered into a cooperating agency agreement with the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (NYS-DEC) and the United States Department of Agriculture Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) to provide input and assist with developing the Deer-Veg Plan/EIS. Involvement by these agencies in the planning process will assist NPS in the development of an effective deer and vegetation management plan for the Seashore.
- Conducted two internal alternatives development workshops, including one with the cooperating agencies, to refine alternatives based on input received from the public during scoping, and from the science team.



Fencing to keep deer off private property forces deer on roadways and boardwalks.



SUMMARY OF PUBLIC COMMENTS RECEIVED DURING SCOPING

A public scoping period for the Deer-Veg Plan/EIS was open from June 17, 2011 through July 31, 2011. During this time, the public and other agencies were encouraged to submit comments on the scope of the Deer-Veg Plan/EIS (purpose, need, objectives, and/or any issues associated with the plan) through the NPS's Planning, Environment, and Public Comment (PEPC) website. Comments also were accepted through the mail and in person at the Seashore.

Though minimal, the public comments submitted addressed a wide range of issues related to deer and vegetation management at the Seashore, and included comments regarding:

- the potential use of volunteers and/or contractors to assist with deer population management
- social impacts
- visitor conflicts and safety
- the NYS-DEC 4-poster tick management study
- non-lethal and lethal deer population management methods, including public hunting

A public scoping report for the Deer-Veg Plan/EIS summarizing the public comments received by the Seashore is posted on the PEPC website at <http://parkplanning.nps.gov/FireIslandDeerPlanScopingReport>.



Deer in Fire Island communities have an impact on native and cultivated vegetation.



A high density of deer congregate in some of the Fire Island communities.



Purpose, need, and objectives

BACKGROUND

The white-tailed deer population on Fire Island has expanded in numbers since the late 1960s to the extent that high deer density in some areas has been, and continues to be, a complex management issue for Seashore managers. Over the last 40 years, extensive research has been conducted and information gathered on deer at the Seashore. The research indicates that deer are adversely impacting vegetation in the Sunken Forest and in other areas of the Seashore, and the ever increasing numbers of deer are creating concerns with residents and visitors. Research has also been conducted on the potential use of reproductive control to reduce elevated deer densities. More detailed background information about the project and the history of deer management at the Seashore is available at: <http://www.nps.gov/fiis/naturescience/deer.htm>.

PURPOSE AND NEED FOR THE PLAN

A draft statement of purpose and need for the Deer-Veg Plan/EIS was presented to the public in Newsletter #1. Based on input received during public scoping and internal discussions with the planning team and cooperating agencies, these statements have been slightly revised as follows:

Purpose

The purpose of this Deer-Veg Plan/EIS is to address issues associated with the abundance, distribution, and behavior of white-tailed deer at the Seashore. The issues include evaluating impacts from white-tailed deer on the natural and cultural resources of the Seashore, as well as impacts resulting from deer-human interaction.

Need

Information collected indicates the need for a management plan to address white-tailed deer abundance, distribution, and behavior due to:

- adverse impacts on native vegetation resulting from white-tailed deer browsing
- adverse interactions with humans and the built environment as a result of:
 - the presence of abundant food sources (i.e.: unsecured garbage, gardens/landscaping, illegal feeding, etc.) and shelter in the communities
 - habituation and conditioning, particularly to food, of deer to the unthreatening presence of humans in the communities and high-visitor use areas
- adverse impacts on natural and cultural resources at the William Floyd Estate resulting from white-tailed deer browsing

PLAN OBJECTIVES

A plan's objectives: help define what must be achieved to consider the plan a success; help shape the range of alternatives for management options; and set the framework for analysis. Similar to the statements of purpose and need presented in Newsletter #1, the draft objectives have been refined based on public input and internal discussions with the planning team and cooperating agencies. In particular, the Deer-Veg Plan/EIS will include objectives for the entire Seashore, as well as more specific objectives for the Sunken Forest, the Fire Island communities, and the William Floyd Estate.



Seashore-wide

- Improve public understanding of the issues associated with white-tailed deer at the Seashore, including human-deer interactions, and the impact of white-tailed deer on the cultural and natural resources of the Seashore.
- Continue to expand the knowledge base regarding the relationship between deer herbivory and plant communities at the Seashore to improve management decisions.
- Improve public understanding of deer/tick relationships throughout the Seashore, including the William Floyd Estate.
- Manage a viable white-tailed deer population in the Seashore that is in support of the other objectives for this plan.
- Work collaboratively with other agencies to manage issues associated with abundance, distribution, and behavior of white-tailed deer on Fire Island.
- Protect special status species/vegetation communities and their habitat from deer browse.
- Promote natural regeneration of native vegetation.

Sunken Forest

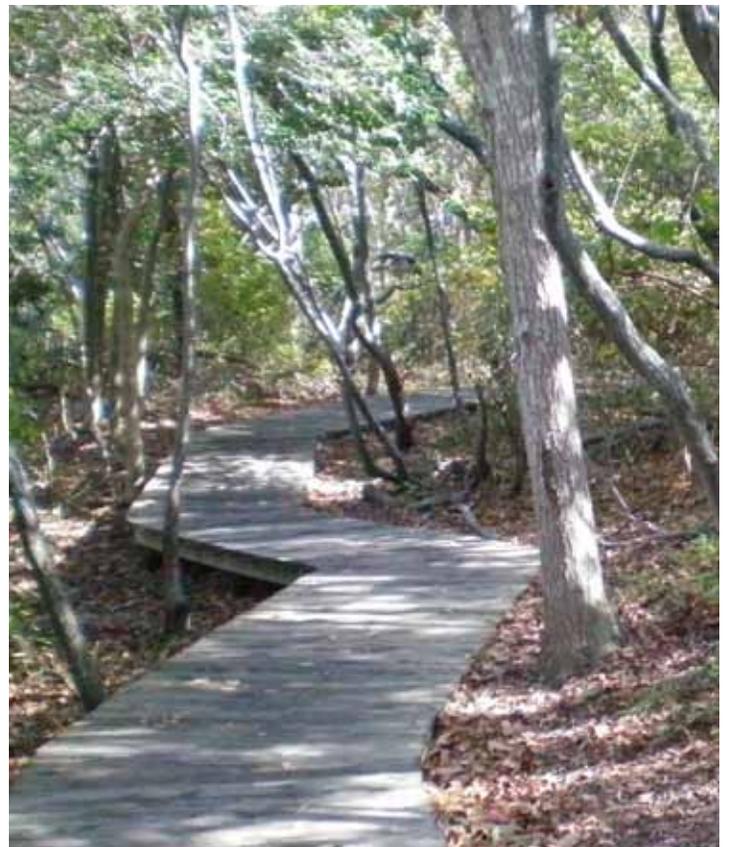
- Maintain the character of the maritime holly forest in perpetuity, by creating conditions for the regeneration of key canopy constituent tree species and a reasonable representation of herbs and shrubs that made up the Sunken Forest's vegetative composition when the Seashore was established.

Fire Island Communities

- Reduce the potential for undesirable human-deer interactions both within the Fire Island communities and other developed areas of the Seashore.

William Floyd Estate

- Manage deer to allow for the restoration, regeneration, and preservation of the cultural landscape of the William Floyd Estate.



*Boardwalk trail through Sunken Forest.
Note limited regeneration of understory.*



Alternatives development process

FACTORS INFLUENCING ALTERNATIVES DEVELOPMENT

In order to address the issues associated with the abundance, distribution, and behavior of white-tailed deer within the Seashore, the planning team considered the following when developing alternatives:

- the different issues and objectives within the Sunken Forest, the Fire Island communities, and the William Floyd Estate require different management actions:
 - **Sunken Forest:** management actions should focus on addressing the impacts of deer browse on the ability of this globally rare maritime holly forest to regenerate
 - **Fire Island communities:** management actions should focus on addressing the impacts of food-conditioned deer; deer densities; and impacts on natural vegetation
 - **William Floyd Estate:** management actions should focus on addressing the impacts of deer browse on the cultural landscape and forest regeneration
- the results of past research and experience related to the use of immunocontraception and public hunting to manage the deer population
- public input received during scoping and on previous projects (i.e., the GMP)
- requirements of other wildlife and land management agencies



A planning team meeting discussing the Deer-Veg Plan/EIS.

RESULTS OF SCIENCE TEAM DISCUSSION

In addition to discussing the relevant science and data available related to the social, natural, and cultural resource issues identified, the science team also provided recommendations on ways to address these issues and meet the objectives of the Deer-Veg Plan/EIS. Some of the general recommendations included:

- using an adaptive management approach to deer population and vegetation management, in particular within the Sunken Forest, the William Floyd Estate, and other natural communities on federal land
- developing a strong public relations/education strategy within the Fire Island communities to address impacts associated with food conditioning
- targeting the food-conditioned deer within the Fire Island communities
- identifying targets for deer populations within the Sunken Forest and William Floyd Estate based on vegetation regeneration targets



ALTERNATIVES DEVELOPMENT WORKSHOPS

The NPS conducted two internal workshops to facilitate the development of alternatives for consideration in the Deer-Veg Plan/EIS. The first workshop was held on December 14, 15, and 16, 2011. At that workshop the planning team reviewed public comments, past research studies, and input from the science team and discussed and evaluated a full range of potential options/alternatives to be carried forward for detailed analysis.

A second workshop was conducted on June 21 and 22, 2012 to give the cooperating agencies an opportunity to provide input to the Deer-Veg Plan/EIS, particularly on the preliminary alternatives developed during the first workshop. The draft alternatives generated at this workshop will be further refined and presented in the Draft Deer-Veg Plan/EIS.



Seashore staff provide NYS-DEC staff with an overview of Sunken Forest and Fire Island.

SUMMARY OF PRELIMINARY ALTERNATIVES

The preliminary alternatives developed during the workshops include a full range of actions that will be considered including:

- public education and communication
- contraception and/or sterilization of white-tailed deer, where appropriate
- culling of white-tailed deer, such as sharpshooting using authorized agents and/or public hunting
- translocation of white-tailed deer within the Seashore
- fencing to exclude white-tailed deer
- planting to restore vegetation

The alternatives will look at specific actions for each geographic area (Sunken Forest, Fire Island communities, William Floyd Estate, and other natural areas/federal tracts), actions that apply throughout the Seashore, and combinations of actions necessary to meet the purpose, need, and objectives for the Deer-Veg Plan/EIS.

After careful consideration of each alternative, including the identification of potential impacts associated with each alternative, the Draft Deer-Veg Plan/EIS will be released for public review and comment, and the NPS preferred alternative will be presented.



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
 NATIONAL PARK SERVICE
 FIRE ISLAND NATIONAL SEASHORE, ATTN: PAULA VALENTINE
 WHITE-TAILED DEER AND VEGETATION MANAGEMENT PLAN/EIS
 120 LAUREL STREET
 PATCHOGUE, NY 11772-3596

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SCHEDULE – FIRE ISLAND NATIONAL SEASHORE WHITE-TAILED DEER AND VEGETATION MANAGEMENT PLAN

The current schedule calls for a Draft Deer-Veg Plan/EIS to be available for public review and comment in late spring/early summer of 2013. Over the course of the next several months the planning team will finalize the alternatives, analyze the impacts of the alternatives, and prepare the Draft Deer-Veg Plan/EIS. During the summer of 2013, a 60-day public comment period will commence upon publication of the Draft Deer-Veg Plan/EIS, and public meetings will be held during this period. The following schedule highlights important steps in the upcoming planning and environmental compliance process.

Schedule — Fire Island National Seashore White-tailed Deer and Vegetation Management Plan / Environmental Impact Statement

Notice of Intent to Prepare the Deer-Veg Plan/EIS Published in the Federal Register	June 2011
Public Scoping Period	June - July 2011
NPS Reviews Public Scoping Comments, Gathers Data, and Drafts Preliminary Alternatives	Fall 2011 - Summer 2012
Distribution of Planning Process Update Newsletter (WE ARE HERE)	Fall 2012
Draft Deer-Veg Plan/EIS to Public for Review and Comment (60 days) and Public Meetings	Summer 2013
Analysis of Public Comments	Winter 2014
NPS Publishes Final Deer-Veg Plan/EIS	Summer 2014
NPS Publishes Record of Decision	Fall 2014