

Draft White-tailed Deer Management Plan and Environmental Impact Statement
Antietam and Monocacy National Battlefields and Manassas National Battlefield Park
Maryland and Virginia



Public Open House Meetings
August 2013



You're Invited! Your participation will help shape this plan.

Dear Friends,

We are pleased to announce the availability of the draft plan and environmental impact statement (Draft Plan/EIS) for white-tailed deer management at Antietam National Battlefield, Monocacy National Battlefield, and Manassas National Battlefield Park. Early in the process, we asked for your input on our stated goals for the plan and the issues that could arise through its implementation.

Using the feedback we received during that initial public scoping effort, and input from a team of scientists convened to inform the planning process, we developed a range of management alternatives for meeting those goals. Our team members then analyzed the impacts of those alternatives on vegetation; white-tailed deer, other wildlife and wildlife habitat, special status species; socioeconomics; visitor use and experience; cultural landscapes; health and safety; and park management and operations. The National Park Service (NPS) then identified a preferred alternative that we believe would best meet the plan goals and objectives and protect the resources and human environment at the battlefields.

All of this information is now presented for your review in the Draft Plan/EIS, which has been prepared in accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act and other laws, policies, and regulations. Because your feedback is essential to the development of the Final Plan/EIS, we are asking for your thoughtful review and comments during the 60-day comment period.

As vital contributors to the planning process, we hope you take the opportunity to provide us your feedback, and if possible, join us at one of our upcoming public meetings. Thank you.

Superintendents

Susan Trail, Antietam National Battlefield

Rick Slade, Monocacy National Battlefield

Ed W. Clark, Manassas National Battlefield Park

Public Open House Meeting Times & Locations

Tuesday, August 27, 2013

6:00 pm—8:00 pm

**Antietam National Battlefield
Visitor Center**

5831 Dunker Church Road
Sharpsburg, Maryland 21782

Wednesday, August 28, 2013

6:00 pm—8:00 pm

**Monocacy National Battlefield
Visitor Center**

5201 Urbana Pike
Frederick, Maryland

Thursday, August 29, 2013

6:00 pm—8:00 pm

**Manassas National Battlefield Park
Visitor Center**

6511 Sudley Road
Manassas, VA 20109

Sustaining Forest Regeneration and Protecting Cultural Landscapes: A White-tailed Deer Management Plan for the Battlefields

Project Background

At all three battlefields, deer population trends, density, and health have been assessed through a variety of research and long-term monitoring projects. Deer density remains an important piece of information to indicate if the deer population may be impacting forest vegetation. Deer density has been monitored at the battlefields and other area national park units since 2001. Deer density at the three battlefields has varied from year to year but remains consistently high, with average densities between 2001 and 2011 of 117 deer per square mile at Antietam, 171 at Monocacy, and 148 at Manassas. Deer densities in 2011 were 131 at Antietam, 236 at Monocacy, and 172 at Manassas.

The large numbers of white-tailed deer within the parks are resulting in a substantial effect on park ecosystems and cultural landscapes due to the deer's heavy browsing of vegetation, including orchards and crops. Studies being conducted by the parks indicate that deer are having adverse effects on tree seedling regeneration and herbaceous cover, which affect habitat quality for other wildlife within the parks that are dependent on this vegetation for food, shelter, and cover.

Purpose of and Need for Action

The purpose of this action is to develop a deer management strategy that supports preservation of the cultural landscape through the protection and restoration of native vegetation and other natural and cultural resources. Action is needed at this time because the sizes of deer herds and deer population density have increased substantially at all three battlefields, and deer are adversely affecting forest regeneration. In addition, deer browsing has resulted in damage to crops and associated vegetation that are key components of the cultural landscapes of the battlefields. It is important to all three battlefields to preserve and restore important cultural landscapes and to preserve agricultural viability within the battlefield grounds. Although the goals vary from battlefield to battlefield, cultural landscape preservation goals are written into the management plans, enabling legislations, and other documents for all three battlefields. In addition, chronic wasting disease (CWD) is proximate to the parks and represents an imminent threat to resources in the parks. There are opportunities to evaluate and plan responses to threats from chronic wasting disease over the long term.

Objectives

Objectives define what must be achieved for an action to be considered a success. Alternatives that are considered must meet all objectives to a large degree and must also resolve the purpose of and need for action. The following objectives relative to deer management at the three battlefields were identified:

Vegetation

- Protect and promote forest regeneration and restoration of the natural abundance, distribution, structure, and composition of native plant communities by reducing excessive deer impacts (e.g., buck rub, trampling, browsing, and invasive seed dispersal).

Wildlife and Habitat

- Maintain a viable white-tailed deer population within the parks while protecting other park resources.
- Protect and preserve other native wildlife species by promoting the restoration of native plant communities.
- Promote early detection, and reduce the probability of spread of chronic wasting disease, a transmissible neurological disease of deer and elk that has been detected in the region.
- Cultural Resources
- Protect the integrity and character of the cultural landscapes, including the spatial patterns of open versus wooded land, and contributing historic views.
- Protect, preserve, and ensure the viability of the historic agricultural landscape, such as crops, orchards, and pasture lands.

Visitor Use and Experience

- Enhance public awareness and understanding of NPS resource management issues, policies, and mandates, especially as they pertain to deer management.
- Ensure visitors have the opportunity to view and experience the battlefield landscapes within their historic contexts.
- Ensure visitors have the opportunity to view deer in the natural environment at population levels that do not adversely impact visitors' enjoyment of other native species in the natural landscape.

Estimated Schedule for Completion of the Final Plan/EIS

Planning Phase	Dates
Public review and comment on Plan/EIS	August–September 2013
Analyze public comments, prepare final Plan/EIS	Fall/Winter 2013/2014
Release final Plan/EIS	Summer 2014
Issue Record of Decision, begin plan implementation	Late Summer/Fall 2014

Alternatives

This Draft Plan/EIS presents and analyzes the potential impacts of four alternatives for deer management and two associated CWD management actions. These alternatives were developed as a result of project scoping by the public, other agencies, and the National Park Service. The alternatives are evaluated for their potential impacts on the environment and park resources and values. Upon conclusion of the decision-making process, the alternative that is selected will become the white-tailed deer management plan for the parks, which will guide future actions over the next 15 to 20 years.

Alternative A: No Action (Continuation of Current Management)—Existing management would continue under alternative A, including deer and vegetation monitoring, data management, research, limited fencing, possible repellent use, education and interpretation, and agency/interjurisdictional cooperation. No new actions would be taken to reduce the effects of deer overbrowsing.

Alternative B: Nonlethal Deer Management—Alternative B would include all actions described under alternative A (with some modifications to monitoring schedules), and would also include several techniques (such as fencing of crops and woodlots, changing crop configurations or selection, and using aversive conditioning) to prevent adverse deer impacts. However, the main focus of deer management under alternative B is the use of a combination of nonlethal actions to address the impacts of high numbers of deer on vegetation and vegetative cultural landscape elements. These

actions include the construction of large-scale deer exclosures (fencing) for the purposes of forest regeneration and the use of nonsurgical reproductive control of does to restrict population growth, using an agent that meets NPS-established criteria.

Alternative C: Lethal Deer Management—Alternative C would include all actions described under alternative A (with some modifications to monitoring schedules) and the additional techniques described under alternative B, but with a primary focus on using lethal deer management actions to reduce the herd size. Direct reduction of the deer herd would be accomplished mainly by sharpshooting with firearms, with a very limited use of capture and euthanasia of individual deer if needed in those few circumstances where sharpshooting would not be considered appropriate due to safety concerns.

Alternative D: Combined Lethal and Nonlethal Deer Management (NPS Preferred)

—Alternative D would include all actions described under alternative A (with some modifications to monitoring schedules) and the additional techniques described under alternative B, but with a primary focus of incorporating a combination of lethal and nonlethal deer management actions from alternatives B and C to address high deer density. Lethal actions (including sharpshooting, with very limited capture/euthanasia if necessary) would be taken initially to reduce the deer herd numbers quickly. Population maintenance would be conducted via nonsurgical reproductive control methods if these are available) and meet NPS criteria for use; if not, sharpshooting would be used for maintenance.



Chronic Wasting Disease Management Alternatives

Alternative A: Continuation of Current Management (this would occur under the no action alternative only)—All parks would continue with opportunistic and targeted surveillance for chronic wasting disease. Antietam and Monocacy would also respond to CWD presence in or near the parks in accordance with their 2009 CWD Detection and Initial Response Plan, and Manassas would work toward creating a similar plan.

Alternatives B, C, and D (this would occur under any of the action alternatives)—All of the action alternatives include a long-term CWD management plan that provides for a longer-term response to chronic wasting disease when it is in or within 5 miles of the parks. The plan includes lethal removal of deer to substantially reduce deer density because high population densities generally support greater rates of disease transmission and have been found to be positively correlated with the prevalence of chronic wasting disease.

Alternatives Considered but Dismissed

- Several alternatives were considered but dismissed from further detailed analysis. The reasons for the decision not

to include these options are explained in detail in chapter 2 of the Draft Plan/EIS.

- Managed hunt / public hunting
- Use of volunteers to assist with lethal reduction (sharpshooting)
- Predator reintroduction or augmentation
- Use of poison
- Capture and relocation
- Supplemental feeding
- Fencing the entire park (or exclusive use of fencing)
- Landscape modification / use of deer resistant plantings
- Reproductive control (as a stand-alone alternative)
- No additional action, but with enhanced research and monitoring
- Other options for long-term management of chronic wasting disease

Where You Can View the Plan/EIS

Digital copies are available for download online at:
<http://parkplanning.nps.gov/battlefielddeerplan>

How to Participate

The plan/EIS will be available for public and agency review and comment until September 27, 2013. During this period, the public is invited to identify any issues or concerns they might have with the proposed plan.

You may provide comments at one of our upcoming public open house meetings, or:

- Online at <http://parkplanning.nps.gov/battlefielddeerplan> (preferred method), or
- By mail to:

Antietam National Battlefield

c/o Superintendent
P.O. Box 158
Sharpsburg, MD 21782
Attn: Deer Management Plan

Monocacy National Battlefield

c/o Superintendent
4632 Araby Church Road
Frederick, MD 21704
Attn: Deer Management Plan

Manassas National Battlefield Park

c/o Superintendent
12521 Lee Highway
Manassas, VA 20109-2005
Attn: Deer Management Plan

Bulk comments in any format (hard copy or electronic) submitted on behalf of others will not be accepted. Before including your personal information in your comment, you should be aware that your entire comment—including your personal identifying information—may be publicly available at any time. Although you may request in your comment that we withhold your personal information from public review, we cannot guarantee that we will be able to do so.

Thank you for your participation!

