

National Park Service  
U.S. Department of the Interior

Cape Cod National Seashore  
Massachusetts



# Final Environmental Impact Statement Cape Cod National Seashore Hunting Program

July 2007



**U.S. Department of the Interior National Park Service**  
**Final Environmental Impact Statement for the Hunting Program at the**  
**Cape Cod National Seashore, Barnstable County, Massachusetts**  
**July 2007**

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**Summary:**

This Final Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) describes alternatives for management of the hunting program at Cape Cod National Seashore (CACO). It also describes potential adverse and beneficial effects to the following:

- natural resources (wildlife, special status species, natural communities, and vegetation);
- cultural heritage (customary hunting activities, berry picking, mushroom gathering);
- public use (land use and recreation; health and safety, and public use and experience);
- socioeconomic values (effects on local/regional economy);
- management and operations (consistency with CACO and National Park Service (NPS) goals, plans, policies, guidelines, mandates, changes to staffing levels and ranger duties, and costs to implement); and
- non-federal lands within CACO (private residential properties, private commercial properties, and municipal and state lands).

Three alternatives for the hunting program are presented, and the environmental consequences of each are analyzed. These include Alternative A – no action, Alternative B – a modified hunting program, and Alternative C – eliminating hunting. These three alternatives were generated from internal and external scoping meetings and agency and public correspondence. Each external scoping meeting was run by NPS staff and included an information session, a public comment period, and a question and response session. The primary purpose of these meetings was to gain public input and inform the public of the ensuing Environmental Impact Statement.

A thorough assessment of the adverse and beneficial effects of each alternative was completed, and a determination was made regarding which alternative would be the NPS preferred and the environmentally preferred alternative. Following the completion of the NEPA process and issuance of the Record of Decision (ROD), the NPS will implement the preferred alternative.

Following issuance of the Draft EIS in April 2006, comments were received on many elements of the analyses and alternatives during the 60-day comment period. A table summarizing the NPS response to each unique comment (Table 34) appears in Section 5.3. Copies of selected comment letters appear in Appendix D. In addition, all comments are part of the public record. The comments resulted in additional information-gathering, consideration, and changes which have been incorporated in this document. The FEIS has benefited from the suggestions, concerns, and information provided during the comment period, and the revised NPS preferred and environmentally preferred alternative reflects the value of the public review process.

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## Executive Summary

The following Draft Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) has been prepared by the National Park Service (NPS) to provide the scope of the administrative decision-making process regarding the hunting program at the Cape Cod National Seashore (CACO) (NPS 2001a). The preparation of this EIS meets the intent of the court order issued during 2003, relating to providing compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (NEPA). The major directive arising from the court order is that the current hunting program, and particularly the pheasant hunting program at CACO, in place since the Park's inception, must be evaluated with respect to achieving NEPA compliance under today's standards. A revised hunting program that is acceptable in meeting these standards will result in a Record of Decision (ROD), and will then be implemented by the NPS. The goals of the proposed action are to:

- manage hunting to minimize effects to wildlife populations and ecosystems and to sustain natural processes;
- manage hunting to reduce or avoid wildlife and human conflicts;
- provide for the protection of natural and cultural resources, cultural heritage, and recreational values;
- provide opportunities for future generations to enjoy the natural and cultural resources, cultural heritage, and recreational values of CACO;
- provide diverse and high quality visitor experiences; and
- develop management solutions that address potential concerns related to the current hunting program.

This Final EIS presents and analyzes three alternatives for maintaining, eliminating, or altering the hunting program, and reviews NPS and CACO policies, the General Management Plan (GMP), and other relevant management plans to assess the consistency of the proposed actions with NPS guidance. It also analyzes the range of beneficial and adverse effects on the environment and has been prepared in accordance with the NEPA.

Three alternatives are presented. Alternative A is the No Action alternative required by NEPA, which analyzes the hunting program as it existed prior to the court's injunction. Alternatives B and C present proposals modifying or eliminating the existing hunting program. Various impact topics were analyzed to determine the level of potential beneficial and adverse effects that could result from each alternative. These topics included:

- natural resources (wildlife [game, non-game, rare species] and vegetation [plants, rare plants, natural communities]);
- cultural resources (cultural heritage [customary hunting activities, berry picking, mushroom gathering]);
- public use (land use and recreation, health and safety, public use and experience, and socioeconomic values [effects on local/regional economy]); and
- management and operations (consistency with CACO and NPS goals, plans, policies, guidelines, and mandates, changes to staffing levels and ranger duties, and costs to implement).

**Alternative A:** The No Action alternative meets much of the basic project purpose as provided above and is also considered as a baseline for comparing the effects of the other alternatives. Under this alternative, hunting would remain as it has since CACO was formed and prior to a court injunction enjoining the pheasant hunt. However, this alternative does not address many of the issues established during the public scoping meetings, especially relating to modifying the hunting program and reducing potential hunting-related visitor conflicts. The continuation of the pheasant hunt would continue to raise the question of the appropriateness of introducing an exotic species with a limited, seasonal presence at

CACO, which is not strictly in compliance with NPS policies. This was the basis for the court injunction that stopped pheasant stocking at CACO.

Maintaining the current hunting program maintains cultural heritage factors that are part of the fabric of life on the Outer Cape (easterly six towns: Chatham, Orleans, Eastham, Wellfleet, Truro, Provincetown), provides recreational opportunities for local residents and individuals from the region, and maintains consistency with CACO goals and the reasons that CACO was established. This alternative does not improve safety, awareness of hunting and non-hunting areas, or recreational opportunities. Adverse effects are relatively minor and include the loss of individuals from game species populations. Adverse effects are negligible with respect to safety with no alterations to existing perceptions of safety for non-hunters.

**Alternative B:** Creating a modified hunting program (the NPS preferred alternative) meets the basic project purpose and addresses many of the concerns raised during the scoping process. This alternative involves retaining a majority of the existing hunting program, adds a spring turkey (*Meleagris gallopavo*) hunting season, and provides an adaptive management approach for phasing out the ring-necked pheasant (*Phasianus colchicus*) hunting program while progressively restoring acres of the CACO landscape to enhance the heathland and grassland plant communities. This restoration effort, while environmentally and culturally appropriate for CACO, will have the ancillary benefit of enhancing opportunities to hunt wild native upland game birds in a manner consistent with NPS policies.

Modifying the current hunting program would provide beneficial effects relating to maintaining and enhancing habitat quality for game and non-game species, maintaining cultural heritage factors that are part of the fabric of life on the Outer Cape, providing recreational opportunities for local residents and individuals from the region, and maintaining consistency with CACO goals as well as with the reasons that CACO was established.

This Alternative would clarify and simplify the areas open and closed to hunting, improve information for hunters and non-hunters, and develop improved communication with the Massachusetts Division of Fisheries and Wildlife in their wildlife monitoring efforts. The provisions to simplify and more clearly delineate hunting areas, together with improved information regarding hunting areas and safety measures, is expected to increase confidence that non-hunting uses can coexist with hunting activity. This is in keeping with the preferences expressed by both hunters and non-hunters in having separation between these activities.

**Alternative C:** This alternative considers eliminating all hunting activity at CACO. Terminating the hunting program has beneficial effects relating to eliminating the loss of individuals from game species' populations. Benefits to safety could occur, given the perception as expressed through some public comment that hunting is unsafe for non-hunters. Visits to CACO might increase by visitors sharing that perception who would otherwise not visit CACO during the hunting seasons. Terminating the hunting program would eliminate hunting as part of the cultural heritage, with an associated loss of recreational opportunities.

**Preferred Alternative:** The NPS considered three main factors when determining which option would be the preferred alternative. The first factor was ensuring that the chosen alternative would meet the project purpose while giving due consideration for minimizing effects to the environment, economics, public safety, cultural heritage, and public use. The second factor was determining which alternative was environmentally preferred and resulted in the least amount of adverse effects to natural and cultural resources. The environmental and cultural considerations included detailed assessments of the various impact topics. The third factor examined whether or not any of the alternatives would impair CACO resources. This impairment determination considered the holistic picture of the alternative and the

potential effects associated with it. After careful review and consideration of these factors, the NPS determined that Alternative B best meets the project purpose, provides the most benefits and the least adverse effects to environmental and cultural resources, and does not impair CACO resources.