

Cuyahoga Valley National Park Draft White-Tailed Deer Management Plan/EIS Public Meetings 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 Cuyahoga Valley National Park. Early in the process, we asked for your input on our stated goals for the plan, and the issues which 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 natural and cultural resources; rural landscapes; socioeconomic resources/adjacent lands; visitor use and experience; visitor, employee, and volunteer health and safety; and park management and operations. The National Park Service (NPS) then identified a preferred alternative which we believe would best meet the plan goals and objectives and protect the resources and values of Cuyahoga Valley National Park.

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!



Project Background

The white-tailed deer is a native species of Ohio and is a component of the natural ecosystems that are protected and maintained by the NPS. However, past and current changes in land use and habitat availability, as well as changes in predator populations and hunting activity, have affected the deer population in the Cuyahoga Valley and surrounding area. Cuyahoga Valley National Park began to address the issues associated with excessive deer numbers and overbrowsing impacts over 20 years ago, and since then has been conducting studies of both deer density and the effects of deer browsing on park resources. Deer density has varied and has decreased in many areas of the park in recent years, but there are large annual fluctuations, and the densities remain above the levels that are considered desirable for forest regeneration.

Purpose of and Need for Action

The purpose of this plan is to develop a white-tailed deer management plan that supports long-term protection, preservation, and restoration of native vegetation and other natural and cultural resources in Cuyahoga Valley National Park. Action is needed to provide the park with a long-term plan to address deer management because the deer population has grown and continues to exist at relatively high densities that can have adverse effects on the park's vegetation. Long-term ecological studies at the park have found that deer browsing is severely impeding the growth of tree seedlings, limiting their height, and suppressing the growth of native groundcover. Deer browsing was also found to be related to a lower abundance of forest songbirds.

A plan is needed at this time to ensure the following:

- Deer do not become the dominant force in the ecosystem, adversely impacting forest regeneration, sensitive vegetation, and other wildlife.
- Natural distribution, abundance, and diversity of plant and animal species are not adversely affected by the large number of white-tailed deer in Cuyahoga Valley National Park.
- Declining forest regeneration is addressed and deer browsing does not continue at a level that eliminates or substantially reduces forest regeneration, and that unacceptable adverse changes to wildlife habitat and forest structure and composition do not occur.



- The park's cultural landscape preservation goals and mandates are not compromised by the large number of white-tailed deer in Cuyahoga Valley National Park.
- Deer management actions are coordinated with other jurisdictional entities and other stakeholders.

Objectives

What does the National Park Service wish to accomplish with this plan?

Management Methodology

- Develop and implement informed, scientifically defensible vegetation and wildlife impact levels and corresponding measures of deer population size that would serve as thresholds for taking adaptive management actions in the park.

Wildlife and Wildlife Habitat

- Reduce adverse effects of deer behavior, including browsing, trampling, and seed dispersal, on the natural abundance, distribution, and diversity of native wildlife species within the park.
- Protect habitat of wildlife species of concern, including rare, threatened, or endangered species, from adverse impacts related to deer behavior, including browsing, trampling, and seed dispersal.
- Maintain a viable white-tailed deer population within the park while protecting other park resources.

Vegetation

- Reduce adverse effects of deer behavior, including browsing, trampling, and seed dispersal, on the natural abundance, distribution, and diversity of native plant species.
- Protect native plant species of concern, including rare, threatened, or endangered species, from adverse impacts related to deer behavior, including browsing, trampling, and seed dispersal.
- Reduce adverse effects of deer behavior, including browsing, trampling, and seed dispersal, on native plant species through dispersal, spread, and facilitation of exotic, invasive species.

Cultural Resources

- Protect the integrity, variety, and character of the rural landscape by minimizing the effects of deer behavior on the rural landscape.

Visitor Experience

- Enhance public awareness and understanding of NPS resource management issues, policies, and mandates, especially as they pertain to deer management.
- Ensure that 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.

Alternatives Considered in the Draft Plan/EIS

This Draft Plan/EIS presents and analyzes the potential impacts of four alternatives. These alternatives were developed with input from the public, other agencies, and the NPS.

Upon conclusion of the decision-making process, the alternative that is selected will become the white-tailed deer management plan for the park, which will guide future actions over the next 15 years.

Alternative A: No Action

The NPS would continue deer monitoring, vegetation monitoring, protection of restoration plantings, data management and research, herd health checks, education, coordination with other agencies, and enforcement of the wildlife feeding ban, but would not take any additional actions.

Alternative B: Combined Nonlethal Actions

Alternative B would include all actions under Alternative A, plus:

- Construct up to 30 large-scale fenced exclosures for the purposes of forest regeneration.
- Implement reproductive control of does if an acceptable reproductive control agent that meets the stated criteria is available.
- Monitor vegetation response in large-scale deer exclosures and monitoring sites, and the effectiveness of deer reproductive control.

Alternative C: Lethal Actions

Alternative C would include all actions under Alternative A, plus:

- Use direct reduction methods (sharpshooting, or capture/euthanasia in limited situations where sharpshooting would not be advisable) to reduce deer herd numbers.
- Focus on areas of the park documented to have substantial deer-related adverse impacts.
- Donate meat, whenever possible.
- Monitor vegetation response to the actions taken.
- Monitor deer density.

Alternative D: Combined Lethal and Nonlethal Actions

Alternative D would include all actions under Alternative A, plus techniques described under Alternatives B and C:

- Use direct reduction methods (sharpshooting, or capture/euthanasia in limited situations where sharpshooting would not be advisable) to reduce deer herd numbers.
- Use reproductive control methods (if an acceptable control agent is available) to maintain population size, with direct reduction used as a fallback method, if needed.
- Donate meat, whenever possible.
- Monitor vegetation response to the actions taken.
- Monitor deer density.



Alternatives Considered but Dismissed

(reasons for dismissal are in italics)

- Managed Hunt/Public Hunting (*hunting on NPS land is not authorized by Congress*).
- Predator Reintroduction (*issues with effectiveness, habitat limitations, and human safety concerns*).
- Use of Poison (*issues with inhumaneness, non-target species, and availability of EPA-approved products*).
- Capture and Relocation (*issues with NPS policy, permits, possible spread of disease, need for extremely high confidence that relocated deer are not infected with CWD, lack of areas to receive relocated deer, high rate of mortality*).
- Supplemental Feeding (*issues with NPS policy, Purpose and Need of plan – might attract more deer*).
- Fencing the Entire Park (*issues with feasibility and health of confined deer*).
- Repellents (*issues with effects on non-target wildlife, need for frequent applications, high application cost, and variable effectiveness*).
- Landscape Modification Through Fencing (*issues with continued deer browsing, limited degree to which fragmentation can be reduced in the park, inconsistent with the plan's objective to rehabilitate and revitalize farms within the park, and potential negative impacts on other wildlife*).
- Reproductive Control as a Stand-alone Alternative (*issues with not meeting the objectives of the plan in a timely manner, low success rate, potential for mortality with sterilization*).



This project is on the Web!!
<http://parkplanning.nps.gov/cuvadeerplan>

Where You Can View the Draft Plan/EIS

- Digital copies are available for download online at: <http://parkplanning.nps.gov/cuvadeerplan>.
- Limited copies are also available by making a request in writing to Cuyahoga Valley National Park, 15610 Vaughn Road, Brecksville, OH 44141.

How to Participate

The Draft Plan/EIS is available for public and agency review and comment during a 60-day public comment period. Public open house meetings will be held on August 14, 2013 as described below.

- Two meetings will be held on the same day at Happy Days Lodge, located at 501 W. Streetsboro Road (State Route 303), Peninsula, OH 44264.
- Meeting times are 1 PM to 3 PM, and 6 PM to 8 PM. Presentations will begin approximately ½ hour after the meeting start time.

You may provide comments at one of the upcoming public open house meetings, and:

- Online at <http://parkplanning.nps.gov/cuvadeerplan> (preferred method), or
- By mail to:
Superintendent
Cuyahoga Valley National Park
15610 Vaughn Road
Brecksville, Ohio 44141
Attention: Deer Management Plan

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.

Estimated Schedule for Completion of the Final Plan/EIS

Planning Phase	Dates
Public review and comment on Draft Plan/EIS	July - 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	Fall 2014