



National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior

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Fire Island National Seashore News Release

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National Park Service Conducts Winter Deer Darting Program at Fire Island National Seashore

Patchogue, NY— Fire Island National Seashore will participate in a second winter deer immunocontraceptive program during late January and early February, 2007. Darting of the female deer (does) is expected to be conducted in Fire Island communities from Corneille Estates through Point O'Woods.

Since 1993, Fire Island National Seashore in cooperation with the Humane Society of the United States (HSUS) has been treating female white- tailed deer (*Odocoileus virginianus*) with the immunocontraceptive vaccine *porcine zona pellucida* (PZP). The deer darting research has been conducted to determine if this can be a humane alternative for controlling the population of deer on Fire Island. Qualified staff or “darters” administer the *PZP* vaccine remotely through the use of a dart. The dart also marks each doe with a nontoxic marker dye, to distinguish treated from untreated animals, then ejects itself from the deer. All darts must be recovered and accounted for, and the safety of people on the island is of utmost concern. Baiting stations have been used in the past to provide the best opportunity for darters to successfully administer treatment. Due to statewide concerns about the potential spread of chronic wasting disease (CWD) at deer feeding stations, the number of baiting stations will be reduced to three this year.

Annual deer population counts have been conducted in conjunction with the fertility control program as a means for determining the efficacy of the *PZP* vaccine. In 1974, Fire Island's deer herd was estimated at 50 individuals; by 1989, it was close to 500; by 2002, it was estimated that 500- 700 deer lived on Fire Island. In the past five years Fire Island has witnessed a steady decline in overall deer numbers, though some communities have witnessed a greater decline than others. Along the mid- island communities (Corneille Estates to Ocean Bay Park), recent deer population estimates have demonstrated steady deer densities compared to surrounding treatment areas.

(more)

To gain a better understanding of the efficacy of fertility control in the mid- island communities, it must be determined whether the lack of a significant decline in deer numbers is partly a result of does being inaccessible during the normal, fall darting time frame. To test this possibility, the NPS and HSUS added a winter darting program in addition to its routine fall darting program. If winter darting is successful, fall darting may be eliminated.

Superintendent Michael Reynolds stated that the idea behind this year's effort is to determine whether or not higher numbers of females can be darted in the winter throughout the mid-island communities. Deer in this portion of Fire Island have had a greater number of fawns, despite previous efforts to dart deer during the fall. "There are many good reasons to test this," stated Reynolds. "Baiting in winter should attract more deer and increase numbers darted, and with fewer residents around, it will certainly make for a safer darting environment".

Darting during the winter of 2007 will take place during dawn and dusk, starting in late January. For more information about Fire Island National Seashore, visit the park's website at www.nps.gov/fiis and search the park site for "[deer](#)."

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