

Vegetation and Deer Management Plan / Environmental Impact Statement

Winter 2017

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior

Morristown National Historical Park
New Jersey



Planning Process Update, Need For Action, and Next Steps

Dear Friends,

As you know, the National Park Service (NPS) has been in the process of preparing a vegetation and deer management plan and environmental impact statement (plan/EIS) for Morristown National Historical Park. I'm sending you this newsletter to update you on the planning process and to summarize the next steps for this year.

We currently are at a crucial decision point because studies show there has been a substantial loss of the park's naturally regenerating native trees as a result of competition from a variety of invasive plant species and pressure from deer browsing. Our goal is to reduce impacts on native vegetation, improve forest regeneration, and help maintain the cultural landscape of the park. The vegetation and deer management plan provides the framework for managing vegetation and deer browsing, thus, promoting a naturally regenerating hardwood forest with mixed-aged classes of trees that reflects the historic and naturally diverse character of the park.

We originally proposed developing an environmental impact statement in 2010. During public scoping in 2011, we invited your comments, on invasive plant management and deer browse strategies. Subsequently, the plan's objectives were updated to expand invasive plant management and include proactive management strategies for Chronic Wasting Disease (a fatal neurological disease found in white-tailed deer) should it be detected in the vicinity of the park.

Following the 2011 scoping, the National Park Service considered all public comments. In addition, subject-matter experts within the National Park Service and in other agencies were consulted; preliminary analysis of the potential environmental impacts of the alternatives presented in 2011 was performed; and the environmental reviews conducted for numerous other NPS deer and ungulate management plans were examined. After much consideration, it was determined that:

- None of the original alternatives have the potential to result in significant adverse environmental impacts. This was determined by our analysis of the plan's alternatives and from our review of other environmental documents prepared for NPS deer and ungulate management plans.

- The use of contraceptives to control deer population growth is not a feasible alternative for deer management and has been dismissed from full analysis. While contraceptives have been analyzed and even incorporated into NPS deer plans, this method has not actually been used for deer management in NPS units because no contraceptive agent is available that meets NPS criteria for use in free-ranging deer populations and development of an agent that meets NPS criteria does not appear imminent. Thus, because the use of contraceptives is not technically feasible at this time and any future use is speculative, this is not a reasonable alternative and has been dismissed from further consideration.

As a result of these determinations, the National Park Service is terminating the environmental impact statement for the vegetation and deer management plan, and instead will prepare an environmental assessment (EA). The environmental assessment will analyze two alternatives:

- Alternative A: (no action): Continue selective invasive species management applications and ongoing monitoring and research about deer browsing effects. If necessary, selectively thin forest stands.
- Alternative B: Manage invasive plants in all openings within a 10-year rotation. As needed, control deer browse by sharpshooting to reduce and maintain deer density. If necessary, selectively thin forest stands.

Public meetings will be held during a 30-day public review and comment period later this year. Upon release of the environmental assessment, we will announce details of the meetings.

For updated information, please check:

<https://parkplanning.nps.gov/morr>

Thank you for your ongoing support of our efforts to reflect the historic condition of Morristown National Historic Park, and to manage its resources in a thoughtful and sustainable manner. If you have questions about the planning process, please contact Chief of Natural Resources Robert Masson at 908-766-6841 or via email at Robert_Masson@nps.gov.

Sincerely,
Thomas E. Ross, Superintendent
Morristown National Historical Park

Thank you for your interest in Morristown NHP's *Vegetation and Deer Management Plan!*