



National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior

Valley Forge National
Historical Park

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Valley Forge National Historical Park - News Release

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Valley Forge National Historical Park Announces Release of the Final White-tailed Deer Management Plan/Environmental Impact Statement

VALLEY FORGE, PA – Valley Forge National Historical Park announces the availability of the *Final* White-tailed Deer Management Plan and Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) to the public. The purpose of the plan is to provide a deer management strategy that supports long-term protection, preservation, and restoration of native vegetation and other natural resources. The secondary purpose of the plan is to provide appropriate response to chronic wasting disease (CWD). A deer management plan is needed at this time to address: (1) Browsing by an increasing number of deer over the past two decades and resulting changes in the species composition, abundance, structure, and distribution of native plant communities and associated wildlife; and (2) Removal of tree seedlings caused by deer browsing and the inability of forests to regenerate into the future. Action regarding CWD is needed because changes in the proximity of CWD to the park and other risk factors have resulted in an elevated risk of CWD occurrence in the park.

Work began on the White-tailed Deer Management Plan/EIS in 2006. Extensive public involvement, including a project web-site, brochure, four public meetings, and over 90 briefings to civic organizations, local elected officials, etc. led to the development of four conceptual deer management alternatives. These alternatives were fully developed using the best available science and were evaluated based on their impacts on the human environment and ability to achieve the stated plan objectives. Under all action alternatives, the initial target deer density is 31-35 deer per square mile (165-185 individuals park-wide). The target number would be adjusted based on the success of forest regeneration (threshold of 8,000 tree seedlings per acre).

All alternatives (including the no-action alternative) include response to CWD. Response to CWD was integrated into each alternative to address the elevated risk of the disease in proximity to the park and because of the efficiencies and cost savings associated with incorporating CWD response into the deer management plan. Response to CWD was developed cooperatively with the Pennsylvania Game Commission. A cooperative approach to CWD response was necessary due to the scale of the management area identified as necessary to address CWD (minimum 79 mi²) relative to park size (5.3 mi²).

Alternative A, the no action alternative, would continue the existing deer management activities of monitoring deer population size and vegetation, small scale fencing of selected vegetation,

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removal of deer killed on roadways, public education, coordination with the Pennsylvania Game Commission, and continuation of limited CWD surveillance. No new deer management actions would be implemented.

Alternative B would combine several non-lethal actions including large-scale rotational fencing of 10% to 15% of the park's forested area and reproductive control of does to gradually reduce deer population in the park. CWD surveillance would include live testing (via tonsillar biopsy) and removal of CWD-positive individuals.

Alternative C would directly reduce the deer population in the park through sharpshooting and through capture and euthanasia, where appropriate, utilizing qualified federal employees or contractors. CWD response would include rapid reduction of the deer population to the target deer density and the potential for a one-time reduction action to not fewer than 10 deer per square mile through sharpshooting and capture and euthanasia. These actions would be taken for the purpose of assessing disease presence, prevalence, and distribution. These actions may also minimize the likelihood of CWD becoming established, minimize the likelihood of amplification and spread if the disease is introduced, and promote elimination of CWD, if possible.

Alternative D is the NPS Preferred Alternative. It would combine actions of Alternative C to directly reduce the deer population and reproductive control of does as described under Alternative B to maintain population levels. CWD response actions would be the same as described for Alternative C.

During the public review period for the *Draft White-tailed Deer Management Plan/EIS* the NPS received 1,168 pieces of correspondence and 3,884 comments. NPS carefully reviewed all comments and prepared a Comment Response Report (contained in Appendix F of the Final plan/EIS). Changes to the plan as a result of public comment consist primarily of factual updates to baseline data and clarifications added to the text. Appendix E, Review of Wildlife Reproductive Control, was substantially updated to more accurately reflect the current state of the science. No changes were made to the preferred alternative or other alternatives evaluated, however.

The EPA Notice of Availability of the Final White-tailed Deer Management Plan/EIS was published on August 21, 2009. This begins a 30-day no action period, after which a Record of Decision (ROD) will be prepared that will document approval of the plan, select the alternative to be implemented, and set forth any stipulations required for implementation. The ROD will be signed by the Northeast Regional Director, after which a Notice of Availability of the ROD will be published in the *Federal Register*. Publication of the Notice of Availability of the ROD will complete the NEPA/planning process, at which time the NPS will begin to implement the selected alternative. NPS expects the ROD to be signed by the end of September.

An electronic version of the Final plan/EIS may be obtained through the Planning, Environment and Public Comment website at <http://parkplanning.nps.gov> or through the park website at <http://www.nps.gov/vafo/parkmgmt/white-tailed-deer.htm>. The plan is also available at the Chester County Public Library, Montgomery County-Norristown Public Library, Phoenixville Public Library, Tredyffrin Township Public Library, Lower Providence Community Library, and Upper Merion Township Library. A hard copy (limited availability) or CD may be obtained from: Superintendent, Valley Forge NHP, 1400 North Outer Line Drive, King of Prussia, Pennsylvania 19406.

For further information please contact Kristina Heister, Natural Resources Manager, Valley Forge NHP, 1400 North Outer Line Drive, King of Prussia, Pennsylvania 19406 or kristina_heister@nps.gov. You may also visit the park website at www.nps.gov/vafo.