

## Deer of Valley Forge National Historic Park Frequently Asked Questions

### What is Valley Forge National Historical Park's (VFNHP) plan for the deer?

The National Park Service's (NPS) Preferred Alternative would combine lethal and nonlethal actions in VFNHP with the intention of killing 80% of the deer over a number of years and attempt to halt their numbers, thereafter, with experimental pharmaceuticals<sup>1</sup>. NPS estimates that implementation of this plan will cost \$2.9 million.



### Why is VFNHP planning to reduce the number of deer?

While the park lists several reasons, they concede in their reasons listed that they have received pressure from residents living adjacent to the park because the residents have had their ornamental plantings eaten<sup>2</sup>. Fencing at the residents' expense is the most logical solution for those who have chosen to live next to a park yet do not want the wildlife as part of their community, instead of embarking on a costly deer reduction plan at the taxpayers' expense.

Additional reasons cited include concerns over native plants being eaten and invasive species proliferating. A study conducted jointly by the Smithsonian Institution - National Zoological Park and Indiana Department of Natural Resources has shown that both fencing and removal of invasive species have a more significant effect on allowing regeneration of native vegetation and that deer have little impact on allowing invasive species to proliferate<sup>3</sup>. Area residents should be strongly encouraged to plant only native species.

A significant amount of the park is covered with paved areas, parking lots, mowed lawns, other manicured areas, and buildings. It is hard to take the park seriously about their concerns over the plant composition when so much of the area is clearly not allowed to have native plants on it.

### Is Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD) a problem?

According to the Pennsylvania Game Commission (PGC), Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD) has not been found in Pennsylvania<sup>4</sup>. The PGC also states that there is no evidence that CWD affects humans. Decreasing the deer population artificially would leave a vacuum for other deer to fill. Based on the PGC's information, fears about CWD should have no bearing on decisions affecting deer in VFNHP.

### What happens if we let the deer be?

Deer are able to control their own reproduction based on the food available. The deer are controlling their own numbers, which have declined and stabilized over the past several years<sup>5</sup>. The deer will continue to control their own numbers in harmony with nature.

### I'm concerned about cars hitting deer. What are my options?

We are concerned about collisions, as well. While we encourage safe driving practices as the first line of defense in reducing any type of collision, there are options to alert deer to oncoming traffic and

1 Briefing Statement, National Park Service, White-tailed Deer Management Plan / EIS, Valley Forge National Historical Park, February 27, 2009. [http://www.nps.gov/vafo/parkmgmt/upload/VAFO\\_DEIS\\_BriefingStmnt\\_2\\_27\\_09\\_final-2.pdf](http://www.nps.gov/vafo/parkmgmt/upload/VAFO_DEIS_BriefingStmnt_2_27_09_final-2.pdf) (Internet accessed 1 July 2009).

2 *White-tailed Deer Management Plan / Environmental Impact Statement Final Internal Scoping Report*, Valley Forge National Historic Park. P 12-13 <http://www.nps.gov/vafo/parkmgmt/upload/Final%20Internal%20deer%20Scoping%20Report.pdf> (Internet accessed 1 July 2009).

3 Norman A. Bourg, William J. McShea, and Chad M. Stewart, "Interactive effects of white-tailed deer and invasive plants on temperate deciduous forest native plant communities." <http://eco.confex.com/eco/2008/techprogram/P11353.HTM> (Internet. Accessed 1 July 2009).

4 Pennsylvania Game Commission, "Chronic Wasting Disease Update." <http://www.pgc.state.pa.us/pgc/cwp/view.asp?a=458&q=163873> (Internet. Accessed 1 July 2009).

5 *White-tailed Deer Management Plan / Environmental Impact Statement Final Internal Scoping Report*, Valley Forge National Historic Park. P 15 <http://www.nps.gov/vafo/parkmgmt/upload/Final%20Internal%20deer%20Scoping%20Report.pdf> (Internet accessed 1 July 2009).

to alert oncoming traffic to deer. The Strieter-lite system uses reflectors to create a strobe-like effect to alert deer and other wild animals with acute night vision of movement in the road. The Roadside Animal Detection System (RADS) detects large animals and alerts drivers with a warning signal. Both methods are highly successful at reducing such accidents. Another possibility is to reduce the speed limit from dusk to dawn. Grand Teton Nation Park has successfully used reduced-speed as a technique to prevent drivers from hitting deer.

Cars hit deer most when the deer are being hunted or killed. Erie Insurance's extensive data, which is used by other insurance companies, found that in Pennsylvania, the two-week hunting season that begins the Monday after Thanksgiving, particularly on opening day and the first Saturday of the season, is when the most deer claims occur<sup>6</sup>. The NPS' plan to discharge weapons just 300' from roads at deer who can run 30-35 MPH will dramatically increase the chances of cars hitting deer particularly on the heavily-traveled Routes 23 and 422.

### **Is birth control a suitable option (or part of an option)?**

VFNHP claims their preferred method is to use birth control after killing the deer. Birth control for deer is problematic on many levels. To use such a pharmaceutical would mean unleashing a large experiment right out in nature. Additionally, experiments on deer with birth control have shown that the deer can suffer side effects including painful areas where the birth control is administered and bone problems<sup>7</sup>.

### **Deer do not have any natural predators. Don't we need to control them?**

Coyotes are making a come back in VFNHP. The bonus with coyotes is that they can exist easily in a park this size – relatively small at five square miles. Coyotes will prey on fawns as individuals and on mature deer as small groups<sup>8</sup>. In addition to the deer's own ability to control their numbers, the coyotes will help to ensure a healthy herd while contributing to wildlife diversity.

### **What about Lyme disease?**

The American Lyme Disease Foundation states that “the nymphs' preferred hosts are small mammals and birds” and that “nymphs are responsible for nearly all of human Lyme disease cases”<sup>9</sup>. Given the high population of other mammals in the park, particularly in the form of humans and dogs, and given that the smaller, preferred hosts would fill any void created by the deer, the deer population likely would have no effect on Lyme disease rates in the area.

### **What is the recommended course of action with the deer?**

The deer need to be respected and not viewed as a problem when they are living in their natural areas. We support Alternative A: No Action at the estimated cost of \$200-400,000 (\$2.5 million less than NPS' preferred alternative). Blaming any of the park's problems on the deer is short-sighted at best considering the park boasts a million human visitors per year, and using violence to approach a situation when peaceful solutions exist sets a poor example. Any issues perceived to be caused by the deer pale in comparison to the human impact on the park, especially when one considers the amount of development in and around the park. Deer should not be deprived of all peaceful, public areas to live and VFNHP has historically offered that peace.

Please contact your US senators and representative to let them know you want NPS to let the deer be.

Printed as a courtesy by CARE ([www.care4animals.org](http://www.care4animals.org)) and Friends of Animals  
([www.friendsofanimals.org](http://www.friendsofanimals.org)).

6 “Watch Out for Deer on Roadways,” Erie Insurance. <http://auto.erieinsurance.com/Deer-car-crashes.aspx> (Internet. Accessed 18 August 2009).

7 “Pathophysiology of white-tailed deer vaccinated with porcine zona pellucida immunocontraceptive.” Paul D. Curtis, Milo E. Richmond, Lowell A. Miller, Fred W. Quimby. *Vaccine* 25 (2007) 4623–4630.

8 “Coyote,” National Park Service. [http://www.nps.gov/romo/naturescience/coyote\\_rmnp.htm](http://www.nps.gov/romo/naturescience/coyote_rmnp.htm) (Internet. Accessed 18 August 2009)

9 “Deer Tick Ecology,” American Lyme Disease Foundation. <http://www.aldf.com/deerTickEcology.shtml> (Internet. Accessed 18 August 2009).