



# Rock Creek Park Deer Management Plan

## Why are deer a problem in Rock Creek Park?

A healthy forest ecosystem contains a diverse range of vegetation and can regenerate itself. The forest of Rock Creek Park, which is about 125 years old, should contain a wide range of native trees in all stages of life, from seedling to sapling to mature. There should also be understory vegetation, including variety of wildflowers, and native shrubs.



American beech is a prominent forest tree in Rock Creek Park and a favorite of white-tailed deer.

However, this vital mix of vegetation is missing at Rock Creek Park because a large white-tailed deer population has compromised the ability of the native forest to regenerate. The park has about 70-80 deer per square mile, while a healthy forest ecosystem should contain only 15-20 deer per square mile. Because white-tailed deer eat a variety of plants in the park, overall forest quality has severely suffered.



White-tailed deer are highly adaptive species that feed on both woody and herbaceous vegetation.

## What is the history of the White-Tailed Deer Management Plan?

In the 1980s Rock Creek Park staff noticed that park's forest quality was degrading. Because many other parks and counties across the Mid-Atlantic region have had problems with deer and forest degradation, park staff suspected they were experiencing a similar problem. They began collecting and analyzing data about the park's



vegetation and deer population in 1991. In accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (NEPA), they studied the impacts of their proposed plans, and considered possible alternatives. They also considered input from stakeholders in the region, including the public, and used all of this information to finalize their plan.

### What is Rock Creek Park doing about it?

After various alternatives were considered, Rock Creek Park held two public scoping meetings in 2006 and a final public review in 2009 to obtain feedback from the public and interested parties.

On May 1<sup>st</sup>, 2012 the National Park Service approved the park's final deer management plan. Out of four different alternatives, including a "no action" alternative, the Record of Decision formally adopted Alternative D. The park staff will take the following steps to implement this plan:

- Continue to **monitor deer population and vegetation growth.**
- Use **protective caging and deer repellents** to protect rare plants in natural areas and small areas in landscaped and cultural areas
- **Maintain current exclosures**, which are fenced areas that protect the habitat inside the fence from deer.
- **Continue current educational and interpretive measures, and communication with other jurisdictions.**
- **Sharpshoot and euthanize deer** initially to quickly reduce the deer herd numbers. **Measures will be taken ensure visitor and employee safety and to protect natural soundscapes.**

- **Maintain a sustainable deer population once it is reached.** Reproductive control methods will be used if available and feasible. If not, sharpshooting will be used as a default option for maintenance.



Ovenbirds nest in understory habitats which deer damage by over-feeding.

### What is the timeline for the project?

The plan is scheduled to go into effect in January, 2013. Within three years, the sustainable deer population level should be achieved. This will ensure the survival of Rock Creek Park's forests. At this point, non-lethal methods, if available and feasible, will maintain population levels. If not, then lethal methods will be used. These practices will be maintained for the duration the plan, which is 15 years.

### Questions/ Comments?

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