

Frequently Asked Questions Fort Meade Deer Culling Plan – January 2016

Why is Fort Meade planning to cull deer?

The closed nature of our installation and the lack of any natural predators have led to the exponential growth of the deer population on Fort Meade. At one time, managed hunting was allowed on the installation. The transfer of rangelands to the Department of the Interior during a 1984 BRAC, combined with population growth, brought a close to the hunting programs on the installation. This will be the first time the installation has used culling to manage the deer population.

Available literature shows that a healthy level for deer population is less than 20 deer for every square mile of space. According to the Fort Meade Study for Fauna and Wildlife Populations (2014), our current population is approximately 52 deer per square mile. The installation is slightly less than eight square miles.

The large population impacts the safety of drivers on post. The number of deer related accidents has increased from six in 2005 to 22 in 2014. As both the deer population and number of vehicles increases, the risk of accidents increases for both deer and drivers.

Most visibly, overpopulation of deer on post impacts the ecosystem by eating or destroying plants other wildlife depend upon. Deer eat and damage plants, flowers, shrubs, rub the bark off trees and eat tree seedlings. The damage around Fort Meade impacts our effort to grow and replace forests on the installation.

Aren't there other ways to control the population?

We looked at other alternatives for addressing the overpopulation of deer however the alternatives either don't address the issue or are simply not feasible. For example, moving the deer somewhere else would cause a great deal of stress and trauma to the deer and, because of the high population of deer throughout the state, there simply isn't any place to move them that isn't already facing over population issues.

Using some method of birth control or sterilization was also considered. At this point, there is no known, successful birth control medication that could be put in food or dropped for deer. The only way to administer birth control is to tranquilize the deer and administer a vaccine. This method causes trauma to the animal and is only effective for about 18 months.

Sterilization of deer requires a surgical procedure, much like for dogs or cats, which would be cost prohibitive and cause extreme trauma for the deer.

More importantly, alternative methods like birth control or sterilization offer a delayed effect, but do not address the immediate issue of overpopulation and the resulting impact to the Fort Meade ecosystem.

Why don't you allow service members or others to hunt the deer?

The culling operation we will use to reduce the deer population is not hunting and should not be confused with recreational activities. Every aspect of the plan has taken the safety of Fort Meade employees, residents and visitors into consideration and will not require alteration of routines or changes in behavior.

In addition, the plan ensures the culling will be conducted in a manner that is as humane as possible.

The US Department of Agriculture marksmen we have selected to remove the deer are professionally qualified federal government employees. These marksmen have years of experience and have conducted these operations on scores of federal and DoD installations

across Maryland and Virginia. They frequently operate in sensitive areas in major cities such as Rock Creek National Park in Washington D.C., residential areas and near airports.

When will you begin to implement this plan?

The culling will be conducted in one-week increments between late January and the end of March. Teams will generally work between dusk and dawn, Monday through Thursday taking care to avoid early morning commuting timeframes. The work should only last a few weeks, but additional time may be needed due to weather conditions.

Our efforts this year will not reduce the number of deer enough to reach our goal for a healthy deer population and habitat. We may need to conduct additional culling operations for several years based on deer surveys and populations after each control effort. We are committed to keeping Fort Meade residents and employees fully informed about these operations and will make announcements as necessary.

What will happen with the deer meat?

The deer will be removed immediately and processed off the installation. All of the meat will be donated to the Maryland Food Bank.

How will you protect the public during this process?

Every aspect of the removal plan has taken the safety of Fort Meade employees, residents and visitors into consideration and will not require alterations of day to day routines.

The marksmen will use methods very similar to those used on a weapons range in which weapons will not be loaded until just prior to taking a shot, and shots will not be taken unless the safety of the shot is verified by left and right spotters. A representative of the Fort Meade Department of Emergency Services will accompany the teams and maintain close contact with the Fort Meade police dispatch at all times.

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The weapons, ammunition and methods of conducting the culling are planned in a way to minimize the distance a round will travel. A downward trajectory, either from the back of a pickup truck or a tree stand, combined with the type of ammunition used, greatly reduces any possibility of rounds passing through the target.

To avoid the possibility of wounded deer, the team's goal is to ensure a 100% drop rate, a goal which they have maintained throughout their operations by only firing when a lethal shot is obtainable.

The teams may use bait to attract deer to areas away from roadways, homes and occupied buildings. During night operations, the culling teams will be using night vision optics to locate the deer and ensure the area surrounding their operations is safe.

Shots will only be taken when at a safe distance from residences.

I love seeing the deer. Will I still be able to see deer when I'm in the park?

The goal of the culling operations is not to eliminate the white-tailed deer population on Fort Meade. The aim is to reduce the population to healthy levels as identified by wildlife experts which is less than 20 deer per square mile. The Fort Meade deer population is currently 52 deer per square mile.

Will the marksmen target only does, bucks or a particular age range of deer?

No. Targeting one sex or age range during culling operations can adversely impact the remaining population. While the targeting of the deer to be culled is not indiscriminant, a balanced mix of age and sex is part of the targeting goals.

Where else have culling operations taken place?

Culling operations have taken place on other military installations as well as in national parks, local parks, historic battlefields and in private locations. These measures have long been considered the most feasible method for maintaining a healthy deer population by wildlife experts.

How much will this operation cost?

The cost of the operation this year is \$73,000. The funds are part of the FY15 environmental budget.