

DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

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DEER HUNTING PROGRAM PROPOSED FOR GREAT SWAMP NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE

A draft environmental statement has been prepared for a white-tailed deer hunting program at Great Swamp National Wildlife Refuge, New Jersey, Lynn A. Greenwalt, Director of Interior's Fish and Wildlife Service announced today.

The statement is available for public review and comment. Copies can be obtained by writing to the Director, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Division of Wildlife Refuges, Washington, D.C. 20240. All public comments received through October 2, 1974, will be considered before a final environmental statement is published.

A controlled public hunt is proposed for December 1974 as the initial phase of a program to reduce deer numbers from the present overpopulation of 600 to a level that can be sustained by the habitat available. Depending on hunter success it is estimated that three to four successive years of hunting will be required to bring the present herd to the 250 animals that can be adequately supported on the refuge. Future hunting will then be required to maintain the balance between the herd and the available habitat.

The 1974 hunt would consist of 400 persons to be chosen from applications filed with the New Jersey Division of Fish, Game and Shellfisheries.

Only 150 hunters would be permitted on the refuge at a time, however. Each hunter would be required to qualify for a permit by the ability to meet a firearm proficiency standard.

Prior to the establishment of the refuge deer were hunted in the swamp. During the period 1964 to 1968 hunting was curtailed on lands that were acquired and added to the refuge. Since 1968 there has been no hunting on the entire 5,885 acre area. The mid-1960 estimated deer population of about 200 increased to the current high level under the protection afforded by the refuge.

Biological monitoring of the deer population by the Fish and Wildlife Service has for several years indicated the classic symptoms associated with a herd increasing beyond the level that could be sustained by the available food supply. This past winter and spring the situation became acute as evidenced by severe damage to food plants on the refuge, greater dependence on and destruction of ornamental plantings and gardens in the area surrounding the refuge, lowered reproduction and reduced body weights due to malnutrition, increased frequency of deer-auto collisions, and the appearance of carcasses of animals confirmed as victims of starvation.