HOW EAC DECIDED THE NON-NATIVE DEER QUESTION

EAC's board voted unanimously to support the Park's proposal to eradicate non-native deer from the Point Reyes National Seashore using a combination of lethal means and contraception. We understand the distress this proposal causes many people and we would welcome technology that would make possible the elimination of the herds by contraceptive means alone. Unfortunately, with the rapid increase in non-native deer populations, the Park does not have the luxury of time. Our decision was based on several grounds:

- **Biodiversity:** The Park, like EAC, holds protection of native biodiversity as a primary and overriding goal. The Park's founding legislation specifically requires that it be managed "to protect and preserve biodiversity and the natural values and natural heritage of the landscape."
- **Ecological Impact**: Non-native deer have adverse impacts on soils, water resources, vegetation, and native wildlife, including some threatened and endangered species. They are in competition for food and territory with native black-tailed deer and tule elk. They do more damage to riparian areas than native species. They congregate in larger herds, damage trees with aggressive rutting behavior, and trample wider trails through the understory and middle layer of vegetation, which is nesting habitat for Swanson's thrushes, MacGillivray's and Orange-crowned warblers, yellowthroats and other ground-nesting songbirds. This behavior also erodes stream banks, compacts soil, and damages water quality, affecting the habitat of some of the Park's most sensitive species--red-legged frogs, freshwater shrimp, Pacific giant salamanders, aquatic garter snakes, coho and steelhead. Non-native deer compete for food with small mammals, many of which are important food sources for native birds of prey, including the endangered Northern spotted owl. Programs to eradicate feral pigs and other invasive aliens have wide public support. EAC believes that manage- ment of invasive exotic species should not be based on their attractiveness or other subjective criteria, but on their ecological impact.
- **Urgency:** Currently, there are roughly 1100 non-native deer in West Marin, largely contained within Park boundaries. Without controls, they will establish breeding populations outside the Park within 2 to 3 years. Indeed, this may have already occurred. Public and private landowners will then begin to experience the same problems that now plague the Park, but it will be much harder, if not impossible, to achieve effective control.
- **Other Options:** Fencing the deer out of riparian areas or into a "deer park" is not a viable option since fences are not effective in confining deer, and a confined deer population will eventually outgrow its assigned area.
  Alternative E, which calls for eradication of the axis and fallow herds through a combination of culling and contraception, would cause fewer deaths than the other proposals.

Many people enjoy seeing the deer from their car or a trail, but a brief visual experience does not convey the full impact these deer have on the environment. EAC hopes that the debate over the future of the deer will result in a greater understanding of the impact of invasive exotics on native ecosystems and of the need for protection and restoration of biodiversity in our national parks.

## Here before the deer

Local resident Bob Soost remembers the days before the deer were introduced.

> *As a part time residence of Inverness from the late 1920's until 1941, I'm somewhat puzzled by persons who consider the fallow and axis deer as "historic" to the area. They certainly weren't part of the "viewing scene" in those times. From a few animals introduced from 1947 into the 50's for the purpose of being hunted, they have increased to hundreds in spite of being heavily culled at intervals from 1968 until 1984.*
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> *It was a real surprise to come upon some of the "white" forms of the fallow deer when I returned to the area in the early 1970's. Seeing the fallow deer in an Olema valley meadow or watching a herd of axis deer from Marshall Beach road is certainly a dramatic experience. However, these non-native species impact the native species and their habitats, either directly or indirectly. Beyond a certain point the impacts*

*become irreversible. In the less than 60 years that they have been here their impacts on the vegetation are already apparent. One only has to look at other places in the world where these species have been present much longer to see how extensive the long-term damage can be.*