



National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior

Assateague Island
National Seashore

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Assateague Island National Seashore

News Release

For Release: November 8, 2006
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Assateague Island National Seashore Seeks Horse Herd Strategy

(Berlin, MD) – Superintendent Scott J. Bentley announced today that the National Park Service (NPS) has begun searching for ways to achieve a better balance between keeping the Assateague horses healthy and free-roaming while protecting the unique natural environment of their island home.

The feral horses of Assateague Island, descendants of horses that escaped domestication some 300 years ago, have survived on the island despite its often harsh conditions. In fact, the horses have thrived too well at a cost to native Delmarva species and have altered the island itself. The NPS, who oversees the horse herd on the Maryland portion of Assateague Island, is now considering ways to keep the horses in better harmony with the island and its other residents.

The NPS recently held a feral horse population and habitat assessment, joining together such groups as the Humane Society of the United States, the American Horse Protection Association, ecologists, geneticists, reproduction specialists, local interest groups, and scientists from government, academic and private institutions. The group examined details about the horses over the past 40 years, including their impacts on the island, the natural characteristics and health of the population, and the importance of the horses to the scientific community and island visitors. This diverse group of specialists agreed that it is possible to develop a long-term management strategy that would address all of the major objectives - a healthy horse herd, protected natural resources, and serving the public interest - although it may require reducing the size of the horse population.

In order to move forward in the planning process, the NPS wishes to hear from the public on matters related to the feral horses on the Maryland portion of Assateague Island. This scoping process is intended to provide citizens with an opportunity to present pertinent information, express concerns, and help generate ideas about how to set appropriate goals and management strategies for the Maryland horse population.

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On December 6, from 6:00 - 8:00 p.m., the National Park Service will host an open house at the Barrier Island Visitor Center, located on Rte 611 just before the bridge to Assateague. Park staff will be on hand to discuss a variety of issues regarding horse health and viability, island natural resources, visitor satisfaction and other topics of concern. Written comments will also be accepted at the Park Headquarters through December 15. For further information, contact Carl Zimmerman at (410) 641-1443 x 213, or by email at carl_zimmerman@nps.gov. Information about the planning process, including background information, can also be found at the National Park Service's Planning, Environment and Public Comment website, located at <http://parkplanning.nps.gov>. Select Assateague Island NS and search for "Development of Alternative for Managing the Feral Horses".

Based on feedback from the public and suggestions made through the scoping process, the National Park Service will develop several horse management alternatives. Those alternatives will be presented in an Environmental Assessment (EA), and made available for public review and comment. It is anticipated that the EA will be available for review in early 2007.

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