

UPDATED: Questions and Answers
Parks Canada's Proposal to Collaboratively Restore Sidney Island's Forest Understorey

Note: These questions and answers are meant to address some of the concerns Parks Canada has heard during ongoing discussions with Sidney Island landowners.

Q1. Can you tell me what this proposal is about? Is Parks Canada proposing to kill all the invasive fallow deer on Sidney Island?

A1. Fallow deer are an invasive species on Sidney Island. Their populations have significantly damaged the forest vegetation through overgrazing, and have negatively affected the native birds and endangered plant species essential to the local ecosystem.

Parks Canada is currently proposing to safely and humanely eradicate invasive fallow deer from Sidney Island to restore the island's ecological health. Eradication planning is a continuation of the significant work already undertaken on the island by private residents with support from the Province of BC, and Parks Canada to reduce their population numbers on Sidney Island.

Parks Canada is currently exploring this proposal in consultation with Sidney Island landowners, local First Nations and key stakeholders. Parks Canada has also hired an organization specializing in invasive species eradication - Coastal Conservation - to study how an eradication operation could be designed for Sidney Island if the project moves ahead. No final decisions have been made at this time.

Q2. Shouldn't animals be protected in a national park reserve?

A2. Eradication of an invasive species is always a difficult decision for Parks Canada. But when an introduced species dramatically impacts the survival of native plants and animals, a decision must be made to either control the invasive species or allow the overall ecosystem to degrade. It is part of Parks Canada's policy to remove invasive species from areas under its jurisdiction.

Our research, coupled with extensive culling efforts, has led Parks Canada to conclude that until the invasive fallow deer population has been removed, the restoration of Sidney Island's devastated forests will not be possible. Eradication is an opportunity to truly restore the island's native forests and songbirds.

Q3. How will the deer be killed? Would the eradication process be humane?

A3. Parks Canada has not yet developed an eradication plan and is working with an organisation specializing in invasive species eradications to develop a safe, humane and effective way to remove invasive fallow deer from Sidney Island. Appropriate techniques for eradication which best suit the environment and island community will be developed as part of this process. It will likely involve techniques that have proven to be effective in over 250 other ungulate eradication operations worldwide.

Animal welfare is important for Parks Canada. Any deer reduction activities will be conducted humanely in accordance with recognized standards, and in consultation with the Society for Prevention of Cruelty to Animals

Q4. Are you proposing removing all deer from Sidney Island?

A4. No. Fallow deer are an introduced or invasive species in the Gulf Islands, where black-tailed deer are native to the islands. Parks Canada is committed to ensuring black-tailed deer population numbers remain at healthy levels.

Q5. Won't the black-tailed deer cause the same problems?

A5. Even at high numbers, black-tailed deer have less of an impact on forest ecosystems than invasive fallow deer. Invasive fallow deer are able to reach higher densities than the solitary black-tailed deer.

Since invasive fallow deer eat both grasses and shrubs, they remove much more of a forest's understorey than black-tailed deer.

Eradication would serve as a crucial step forward in a long-term forest restoration project. Following the removal of invasive fallow deer from Sidney Island, Parks Canada would work with landowners to collaboratively develop strategies to support the growth of native plants, control invasive plants, and ensure black-tailed deer population numbers remain at healthy levels.

Q6. How long would eradication take?

A6. Significant effort goes into planning an eradication operation to ensure safety and success. If Parks Canada receives support from Sidney Island landowners and First Nations, it would likely take approximately one year to develop and finalize an operational plan for eradication. Active eradication would likely occur between late September and late March, likely over two winter seasons. In the year following eradication, multiple surveys would be conducted to confirm the removal of all fallow deer.

Q7. When would eradication start?

A7. If supported, eradication would likely start in the winter of 2019-20. Prior to the eradication operation, we would be testing proposed methods, undertaking accurate deer counts, monitoring ecosystem conditions, and working with landowners to plan a safe, efficient, and effective operation.

Q8. Why not just organize hunts and culls to control invasive fallow deer population numbers?

A8. Tremendous investment by Sidney Island landowners over the last 30 years, together with Parks Canada's deer management efforts and traditional harvesting by local Coast Salish First Nations over the last decade, has resulted in substantial gains, but has not been sufficient to restore the forest ecosystem on Sidney Island. In fact, Parks Canada's monitoring program has found that the current population of invasive fallow deer on Sidney Island is at least 4 times greater than a healthy ecosystem can support. Eradication would have the greatest long-term benefit.

In the end, prolonged hunting actually results in more animal deaths than an eradication operation, since deer continue to breed while targeted hunts take place year after year. This fact is already apparent on Sidney Island where an eradication effort would likely involve the destruction of fewer than 1,000 deer, while ongoing hunting and culls have killed approximately 14,000 deer to date.

Q9. Will visitors and residents be safe?

A9. Public safety is the top priority for Parks Canada. Eradication measures will be designed to minimize risk to landowners and visitors. Eradication efforts would take place during the fall and winter season, when visitation on the island is low and the park side of Sidney Island is already closed annually for First Nations deer hunting.

Parks Canada is committed to working with landowners, including experienced hunters to develop a safety plan which will identify and assess risks and then develop risk mitigation strategies that are practical, effective, and minimize inconvenience to residents. A few examples of key elements include:

- A detailed plan for communicating operational activities and safety measures on a daily and weekly basis to landowners.
- A detailed set of hunt rules established with input from experienced landowner-hunters.
- Mandatory orientation for eradication personnel
- Check-in procedures for individuals entering active hunting zones
- Emergency protocols

Q10. Will the project be cancelled if some Sidney Island landowners oppose the project?

A10. Sidney Island landowners will hold a vote to determine community support for the project. The island's Strata Council will determine what level of agreement is needed for the community to officially support the proposal. Parks Canada will respect the decision of the community.

Q11. Is Parks Canada allowed to remove animals outside of the national park reserve?

A11. Parks Canada would require a provincial permit to remove wildlife from any lands not under its jurisdiction on Sidney Island, in addition to support from the community. Parks Canada is already in discussions with the Province of BC on this matter who have also played a key role in managing invasive fallow deer on Sidney Island.

Q12. Who do owners complain to if they think a hunter is not following rules?

A12. If the eradication operation were to take place, agreed upon hunting rules would be strictly enforced. Any issues would need to be reported immediately to Parks Canada so that the matter could be investigated. Any emergencies requiring urgent intervention could be reported to Parks Canada's 24-hour dispatch line at 1-877-852-3100.

Parks Canada is committed to working with highly qualified, certified, and experienced deer eradication professionals with a proven track record of operating safely and respecting community values. In the event that a hunter is reported to have violated agreed upon rules, Parks Canada, together with Sidney Island Landowners, would investigate the violation and recommend an appropriate course of action to the project steering committee.

Q13. How much control do we have over the quality, safety, and performance of hunters?

A13. Parks Canada recognizes that this project will only be successful if landowners are deeply involved in the planning and implementation of this project. Parks Canada will solicit the involvement of landowner representatives in the development and approval of protocols specific to the hunting operation. Protocols around hunting activity would need to reflect the perspectives of landowners, ensure the safety of all involved, and support a successful eradication operation. Recreational hunters will not be utilized for hunting during eradication operations. Only highly trained professional hunters with a proven safety record and experience with deer eradications would be involved.

Q14. How can Parks Canada support academic research on Sidney Island following eradication?

A14. Parks Canada regularly collaborates with academic institutions to support research within our protected places. National parks, and islands in particular, have long served as valuable study areas for scientists, including Sidney Island. The removal of fallow deer from Sidney Island will represent an unprecedented opportunity for academic investigation in to the outcomes of this adaptive management effort. Parks Canada also plans to incorporate the expertise of established local academics in the design and delivery of monitoring and restoration plans. This will provide an opportunity for graduate student involvement in the project. Parks Canada would also be able to support research directly by granting research permits on Parks Canada lands, and providing in kind support when possible.

Q15. How long would restoration take?

A15. Parks Canada is committed to supporting restoration both on park and private lands, following the removal of invasive fallow deer. A restoration plan would be developed collaboratively with Sidney Island landowners, First Nations, and academics. With active restoration, there would likely be a noticeable improvement in forest understorey health in three to four years following eradication. Due to the extensive impacts caused by excessive browsing, combined with natural ecological regeneration times, a longer period of time would be needed for Sidney Island to reach its full ecological potential with a range of rare flowers, birds, butterflies and other species flourishing on the island.

Q16. How many years would it take for black-tailed deer to increase their population once fallow deer are removed?

A16. It is impossible to predict exactly how fast black-tailed deer numbers would rise in the absence of fallow deer. An increase in available resources associated with ecosystem recovery may positively influence reproduction, and black-tailed deer may swim to Sidney Island from other islands. Parks

Canada is committed to working collaboratively with landowners to develop a black-tailed deer management plan that is practical to implement and ensures black-tailed deer on Sidney Island don't become hyperabundant in the absence of invasive fallow deer.

Q17. How much funding will Parks Canada be able to give Sidney Island landowners for restoration on its own land? And how would these funds be transferred?

A17. If eradication is supported by Sidney Island landowners, Parks Canada will commit to developing an island-wide forest restoration plan in collaboration with Sidney Island landowners, outlining plans and strategies to support restoration objectives of priority to landowners. Parks Canada currently has an approved funding to spend on forest restoration activities on Sidney Island, such as staff salary, planning and consultation activities, materials, restoration operations, and volunteer coordination. In the absence of a detailed restoration plan, it is premature to separate spending forecasts between public and private land. To aid in restoration activities, Parks Canada can also make use of the existing native plant propagation facilities at Fort-Rodd Hill, as well as extensive in-house expertise in invasive plant management and native vegetation restoration.

Q18. How do you distinguish between fallow and black-tailed deer from the helicopter, or at night?

A18. If eradication of fallow deer is supported by Sidney Island landowners, eradication experts would undertake several types of trials to ensure the operation reflected the realities of Sidney Island, including the presence of two deer species. Prior to eradication, experts would test their ability to distinguish between black-tailed and fallow deer using both regular hunting scopes and Forward Looking Infrared scopes, an imaging technology that senses infrared radiation (body heat). If it is not possible to accurately distinguish between the two species, then these methods will not be appropriate for the eradication on Sidney Island.

Q19. How does Parks Canada get approval for the eradication techniques given that they are outside normal hunting regulations?

A19. Parks Canada will continue ongoing discussions with the Province of BC to ensure the necessary approvals are in place prior to any eradication work taking place on non-federal lands.

Q20. If I support eradication, do I have to allow hunting on my own property?

A20. No. However, for the eradication operation to be feasible, a large majority of landowners would need to allow access to their property. The more landowners that refuse access to their property, the longer the eradication would take, and the more expensive it would be.

If Sidney Island landowners vote in favour of eradication, Parks Canada would need to obtain approval from each individual landowner to allow access to their property. Those who are not comfortable with this step, could be asked to designate community representatives to flush deer from their property to neighbouring lands. Landowners that did allow access to their property would subsequently be asked whether they would permit active hunting on their property. In order for hunting to occur on private property, landowners would need to vote to temporarily change the existing bylaw on hunting on these lands, and then provide written consent to the eradication team regarding their individual property.

Q21. What is the procedure in the event of damage to private property?

A21. By hiring world experts in deer eradication, and involving Sidney Island landowners in the planning process, Parks Canada would take every step to ensure the probability of damage to private property is extremely low. In the event of damage to private property that is a result of eradication activities, the landowner would need to submit a claim to the Gulf Islands National Park Reserve at gulf.islands@pc.gc.ca. The park reserve would then review the claim and determine the best course of action, depending on the nature of the claim. Parks Canada underwrites its own risk and has the ability to compensate for damage where appropriate. Parks Canada would work to ensure that any submitted claims were processed as quickly as possible.

Eradication experts contracted by Parks Canada would be required to have commercial general liability insurance which would provide coverage in the event of damage to private property. Commercial general liability insurance can include the provision of an adjuster to arrange for repair of damages, if necessary.

The process for arranging repairs is determined on a case by case basis and is determined through consultation between the landowner and the insurance provider.

Q22. How would Parks Canada handle deer remains?

A22. All reasonable attempts would be made to maximize the amount of meat recovered during the project. Parks Canada would coordinate the processing of deer meat as part of the eradication process. Deer culled would be processed by a licensed contractor, similar to the mobile abattoir used in previous cull operations. Sidney Island landowners would have the option to keep a portion of the meat from the deer killed. Meat would also be offered to local Indigenous communities and potentially donated to local schools or community groups in need. Deer carcasses that did not meet CFIA standards could be donated to local wildlife rehabilitation centres such as the BC SPCA Wild Animal Rehabilitation Centre or left in situ or placed at a designated composting site to allow natural nutrient recycling to occur. Deer carcasses would be removed from private properties, should active hunting be permitted on those lands.

Following the rapid population reduction phase, deer numbers on the island, and consequently the level of carcass processing would be considerably reduced. Deer recovered during the later phases of the project could be provided to local Indigenous communities or landowners in a similar approach.

Q23. How would Parks Canada communicate with landowners?

A23. Parks Canada would work with landowner representatives to determine preferred methods of communication for each stage of the planning and operational phases of the project. During the planning phase, landowners would receive periodic email updates outlining progress and next steps. Landowners will also be able to access background information about the project on the dedicated project website. Options for communications during operations include email updates, posters at key access points, website updates, direct communications with landowners present on the island via text, phone call or email, and the option for landowners to contact project leaders directly via cell and office telephone.

Q24. What is the plan for communicating with media?

A24. Parks Canada has a local communications staff member who would deal directly with media requests and ensure Sidney Island landowners were given equal opportunity to share their perspectives on the project, if desired by the community.

Q25. How will eradication personnel get to and from the island, where will they stay, and how will they get around?

A25. Eradication personnel would get to and from the island via Parks Canada vessels and via helicopter. They would move around the island by foot, vehicle, All-terrain vehicle (ATV), or occasionally via helicopter. Eradication personnel could stay on island if accommodations were arranged, potentially in Parks Canada camping areas. There is no expectation that landowners would provide accommodation or facilities for eradication personnel. There is an expectation that eradication personnel would have access to common lands, including roads, if landowners vote in favour of eradication.