

Army site's new owner plans to preserve rare white deer herd

July 5 2016, by Mary Esch

A rare herd of ghostly white deer that multiplied at a World War II weapons depot under the protection of the U.S. Army is now being nurtured by the site's new owner.

Seneca Iron Works owner Earl Martin has planted 15 acres of soybeans to improve the diet of the deer roaming the former Seneca Army Depot in the Finger Lakes, and is working with a nonprofit group to develop about 1,500 acres of the 7,000-acre site as a wildlife preserve and ecotourism park.

"The idea is to create tourism and wildlife conservation in the northern part of the depot and develop businesses in the southern portion," Bob Aronson, executive director of the Seneca County Industrial Development Agency, said in a recent interview.

Martin's winning \$900,000 bid, announced last month, includes plans to create 200 jobs, expand his iron works business, establish about 20 Amish homesteads and renovate a short-line railroad.

Preserving the white deer was a priority of wildlife groups when the depot was put up for sale.

The deer aren't albinos, but are a natural mutation of common white-tailed deer. In the wild, white deer have short lifespans, because they are easy targets for predators and hunters. But the 24-mile fence that encloses the depot and the Army's protective policies allowed the white

deer to multiply in peace among more than 500 concrete munitions storage bunkers.

Aronson and Martin are including the [nonprofit group](#) Seneca White Deer in development plans. The group was among the other bidders for the property, one of the largest developable sites in the region.

Dennis Money, who heads the group, noted that the herd of white deer has fallen from about 200 eight years ago to about 75 today.

"One of the primary things we need to do is improve habitat and food availability to help bring the deer back up to the numbers there were before," Money said. Normal brown deer have also decreased, he said. "We need to put in better quality foods, like clover, turnips, soybeans and corn."

Seneca White Deer ran some bus tours at the depot between 2006 and 2012. Money envisions future tours that will include not only the deer, but also the history of what was one of the most important Cold War storehouses of bombs and ammunition.

"We're hoping maybe in 2017 it will be opened to the general population," Money said.

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