We have not been informed of any hazard this deer causes on the island, the resolution said.

By JACK HARPER

APALACHICOLA — A vanishing herd of exotic Sambar deer have been saved this year on St. Vincent Island off the Florida coast near here, but the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service still wants to get rid of them.

“No action to rid the island of the Sambar will be taken this hunting season,” said John C. Overheu, acting district director, in a letter to Apalachehcola Mayor Jimmy Nichols Monday.

But another study will be made, the letter said, followed by public hearings in the Apalachicola area in the event a definite decision is made to rid the island of the deer brought in from India 70 years ago.

Proposals by the federal wildlife agency to have no limits on age, sex or number of Sambar deer killed during its three hunts in the fall have enraged local residents.

“There’s no Sambar on the island now that hasn’t been born there,” said Mayor Nichols. “They’re second and third generation Americans now.”

Mayor Nichols is among a strong group of residents who feel the Sambar adds something special to the area.

The only other Sambar deer roaming wild in America today, according to game officials, are near a ranch in southeast Texas where they were introduced a few years ago.

The St. Vincent Island Sambar were brought in by Dr. Ray Vaughn Pierce in 1908. He released three does and a buck from the New York Zoological Park on the 12,358 acre island he had bought the year before.

Dr. Pierce was famous and wealthy at the turn of the century through the sale of his patented medicines throughout the country.

Later, zebra, black buck and eland were brought to the island. A few survived but the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service removed them when it purchased the island in 1899.

Now the Sambar deer, numbering an estimated 125, a few black buck, a herd of some 450 native whitetail deer, and wild hogs are all that remains of the once planned African game farm envisioned for the island.

The Sambar is of the elk clan of split hooved animals, related to the American elk but native of India. A full grown Sambar weighs 600 to 700 pounds, nearly twice the size of the native whitetail. It is brownish in color and has large antlers.

Tom Barnes, assistant island manager, says it is the policy of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to manage only native wildlife in the refuge.

“People around here feel the Sambar is something special and a drawing card for the area,” he said.

The island, owned by the government, holds three hunts a year. Two for bow and arrow hunters are held in October and November. In December hunters using old time muzzle loading weapons are allowed in on a special hunt.

Barnes said the service has a written policy not to introduce exotic species of animals on national refuges.

“We don’t have any hard data on the Sambar,” he said, “but we feel the herd competes with the native deer for food and habitat.”

He admits that, except for that competition, the Sambar has no other bad effects on the island.

The Franklin County Commission has also entered the fight to save the Sambar.

In a resolution sent to Florida Senators Lawton Chiles and Richard Stone and Congressmen Don Fuqua, the commission asked that the deer be protected and allowed to live on the island.

“We have not been informed of any hazard this deer causes on the island,” the resolution said.