

Your Deer Population is a Resource

Many hunters have the philosophy (or situation if you prefer) where they go out in the woods hunting and if they see a deer they shoot it. After all it may be the only deer that they see throughout the entire hunting season. Their fathers and forefathers have all done this and this is the way it's always been. Some of these hunters are completely satisfied with this situation and expect nothing more. The important thing to them is that they are happy with their existing situation. On the other hand many of these hunters would like their deer hunting to be better than it is. This might mean that they want to see more deer during the season *or* it might mean that they want to see more Bucks during the season *or* it might mean that they want to see more older Bucks during the season *or* it might mean that they want to see more bigger antlered Bucks during the season and so on and so forth. For those hunters that would like to see an improvement in their hunting experience I offer the following:

We have actually run the full gamut from the hunter that I described above to the serious deer hunters/managers that we are today. Because I say serious don't think that we aren't having fun. We are enjoying the monitoring and managing part as much as we are the shooting part. It is very rewarding to see your deer population change as a result of management decisions that you make and practice. Knowing that we have improved our hunting by setting and following certain guidelines is something that I wish all hunters could see. I see hunters that spend hundreds of dollars on their deer hunting but spend no money, time or effort on keeping track of this valuable resource, ***their deer population***. We balance our check books so we don't spend more money than we have. (*I hope*) If I know that my bank account balance is getting low then I know that I can't spend much money until I replenish it. In the same token if our deer population is low (and below the carrying capacity of the property) then we will cut back on the number of deer that we harvest to try to replenish it. We should all try to keep track of how many deer we are shooting and our observation/trail camera counts season by season. You would be surprised at what this kind of information will show you. You can now make decisions based on your actual deer harvests and observation/camera count history. If our deer counts go down unexpectedly then we may make the decision to shoot fewer deer the next season if we deem that necessary. If our counts go up then we may have to consider shooting more deer unless we are trying to increase our deer population. We've hunted properties where we may see one deer every three days and we've hunted properties where we may see ten deer every single day. We proved both of these scenarios by doing some simple record keeping. In these two scenarios the harvesting guidelines will obviously be completely different and that's how it should be. You can ask the best deer manager in the world how many deer you should be shooting and unless you can provide them with some specifics of your deer population and harvests it will be difficult if not impossible for them to make a sound recommendation.

Many hunters hear the words "Deer Management" and they immediately shun the thought. After all, you can't manage your property when your neighbors shoot every deer that they see. This neighbor influence as I call it is the most common reason I hear to justify why you can't manage your property. In some cases this may be true but *please* don't assume that this is the situation that exists. I heard of a situation where there were two neighbors that were both saying that their neighbors were

shooting every deer that they saw so it wasn't worth trying to manage their properties. When a supplier talked to each of these property owners and he heard this he got them to talk to each other and lo and behold today they are working together to see if they can improve their deer hunting. The second most common reason for why you can't manage your property is because you have small acreage. You can't manage 50 acres because the deer are probably spending more of their time on neighboring properties than on your property. There is a lot of truth to this but again don't assume that your neighbors are shooting every deer that they see and don't assume that they don't want to work with you. I assure you that if we were your neighbor we would love to share information with you about our deer population and would gladly work with you in determining any harvest guidelines that could be established for both your property and ours. Both properties could benefit immensely as a result of this joint effort. This deer management stuff can be contagious. When we share pictures and videos with all of our neighbors we ALL get excited to know that we are all contributing to the improvement of our deer hunting. In our case it's trying to grow some big antlered Bucks. In your case it might just be increasing the deer population. In many scenarios there is the assumption that the deer you let walk will get shot by someone else. You know what they say about assumption. 😊 I have proved that some of the Bucks that we let walk have gotten shot elsewhere but I have also proved that some of the Bucks that we let walk make it through hunting season unscathed. Since we started working with our neighbors we can confidently say that most of the Bucks that we let walk (on purpose) are surviving hunting season. We know that it only takes one of these Bucks with good antlers to become that Buck with Great Antlers. In the same token we now have a better opportunity to shoot that trophy aged Buck. Like I said in some of my other articles we consider a Buck 4 ½ years old and older to be a trophy regardless of his antler size! Remember that our property is not under a high fence.

In summary, we should all make an effort to keep track of our own deer populations. No, I can't tell you exactly how many deer we have on our property but I can tell you *exactly* how many Does and Bucks we have harvested since 1996 season by season. I can also tell you what our average deer sightings are per hunt since 1996 season by season. If you have small acreage then get together with your neighbors and see if you can all work together on monitoring your deer populations. Why don't you take the initiative and offer to record all of the harvest information for all of the neighboring properties. If you can track the sightings information for all of the properties then that would be a great thing as well. Remember that the sightings information might be a camera survey, pre-season observation counts or in season sightings counts. Please read my article "Should I Track my Sightings or do a Camera Survey" where I explain the different options. Our deer are a great resource and it is our responsibility as landowners and hunters to monitor and take care of that resource. I want our children and children's children to be able to enjoy this great experience we call deer hunting.