

# Fair Chase Whitetails

## Part 7

*In earlier parts of this special series, we discussed reader views on various aspects of ethical deer hunting and management. What might these opinions tell us about the past, present and future?*

*by Gordon Whittington*

Over the past five issues, we've presented the results of our special reader survey on that nebulous concept known as "fair chase." In hopes of determining what's ethical and what isn't in the deer woods, in the January 2001 issue we asked you to vote for or against a broad range of hunting and management practices, each of them legal in at least one state or province. Here's a final look at how the voting went for all 36 of the questions. (Note: The "yes" and "no" responses to most questions total less than 100 percent, as not every respondent answered every question.)

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1. Is it fair chase to hunt whitetails that have been handled by man? *Yes: 14 percent; No: 84 percent*
2. Is it fair chase to hunt whitetails where the habitat has been noticeably damaged by overbrowsing? *Yes: 77 percent; No: 21 percent*
3. Is it fair chase to introduce non-native genetics into a whitetail herd (by stocking and/or artificial insemination)? *Yes: 43 percent; No: 55 percent*
4. Is it fair chase to use supplemental feed to increase the number and/or size of deer in a herd? *Yes: 79 percent; No: 18 percent*
5. Is it fair chase to use food plots to increase the number and/or size of deer in a herd? *Yes: 90 percent; No: 9 percent*
6. Is it possible to provide fair-chase whitetail hunting on a high-fenced tract? *Yes: 40 percent; No: 58 percent*
7. Have you or anyone you know ever hunted inside a high fence? *Yes: 23 percent; No: 77 percent*
8. If you had full control of a tract of land and no financial limitations, would you erect a high fence? *Yes: 25*

*percent; No: 73 percent*

9. If you answered "Yes" to Question 6, what do you think is the minimum total acreage required for fair chase inside a high fence? *1,458 acres (average)*

10. If you answered "Yes" to Question 6, what do you think is the minimum acreage of escape cover required for fair chase inside a high fence? *834 acres (average)*

11. If you answered "Yes" to Question 6, what do you think is the minimum total acreage *per hunter* required for fair chase inside a high fence? *244 acres (average)*

12. What do you think is the minimum total acreage *per hunter* needed in order to have fair chase on land *not* enclosed by a high fence? *126 acres (average)*

13. Is it fair chase to hunt near feed bait? *Yes: 37 percent; No: 58 percent*

14. Is it fair chase to hunt near a food plot? *Yes: 88 percent; No: 11 percent*

15. Is it fair chase to use does as bait? *Yes: 54 percent; No: 41 percent*

16. Is it fair chase to hunt near a waterhole? *Yes: 92 percent; No: 6 percent*

17. Is it fair chase to use people to drive deer? *Yes: 79 percent; No: 20 percent*

18. Is it fair chase to use dogs to drive deer? *Yes: 27 percent; No: 71 percent*

19. Is it fair chase to shoot deer from a motor vehicle? *Yes: 10 percent; No: 90 percent*

20. Is it fair chase to hunt on an island? *Yes: 87 percent; No: 8 percent*

21. Is it fair chase to hunt with a guide? *Yes: 91 percent; No: 8 percent*

22. Is it fair chase to track deer in

*snow? Yes: 99 percent; No: 1 percent*

23. Is it fair chase to use an aircraft for scouting? *Yes: 46 percent; No: 53 percent*

24. Is it fair chase to use a spotlight for scouting? *Yes: 50 percent; No: 49 percent*

25. Is it fair chase to use a camera for scouting? *Yes: 90 percent; No: 10 percent*

26. Is it fair chase to use GPS technology in deer hunting? *Yes: 83 percent; No: 13 percent*

27. Is it fair chase to use a human odor eliminator? *Yes: 95 percent; No: 4 percent*

28. Is it fair chase to use calls and rattling? *Yes: 98 percent; No: 2 percent*

29. Is it fair chase to use a deer decoy? *Yes: 84 percent; No: 14 percent*

30. Is it fair chase to use an attractant scent? *Yes: 94 percent; No: 5 percent*

31. Is it fair chase to use a laser rangefinder? *Yes: 80 percent; No: 20 percent*

32. Is it fair chase to use an ultra-long-range rifle? *Yes: 69 percent; No: 29 percent*

33. Is it fair chase to use an in-line muzzleloader? *Yes: 84 percent; No: 14 percent*

34. Is it fair chase to use a scope on a muzzleloader? *Yes: 77 percent; No:*

*If you had this huge buck in your sights right now, and it was legal to hunt over bait in the area, would it be fair chase? The record books say yes, but many North American WHITE-TAIL readers disagree. This is just one issue on which serious hunters are split. Photo by Dave N. Richards.*

21 percent

35. Is it fair chase to use a bow with over 65 percent let-off? *Yes: 79 percent; No: 18 percent*

36. Is it fair chase to use a crossbow in archery season? *Yes: 51 percent; No: 47 percent*

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Of course, whitetail hunting and management are regulated by wildlife officials in each state and province, not by any national or continental body. (Endangered subspecies, including the Key deer of Florida, are notable exceptions.) There's no legal mandate for developing a universal set of rules defining fair chase. However, because the various record books have their own rules concerning ethical standards for trophy entries, blanket policies for fair chase are in effect, and it's interesting to see how your votes on some of those issues compared to those rules.

Many of you noted on your surveys that if a deer is harvested in compliance with local hunting regulations, it meets your definition of a fair-chase kill. However, that notion won't always get you too far with some of the record-keeping organizations. Even if a trophy buck is taken in full compliance with the regulations of the state or province, the Boone and

Crockett Club, the Pope and Young Club, and the Longhunter Society all might still refuse to accept it because the kill didn't meet their standards of fair chase.

A classic example, and one that puzzles some observers, concerns baiting. P&Y will accept a buck taken over feed bait, provided that the practice is legal in the state/province where the kill occurred. This is ostensibly done to conform to local regulations, and it's consistent with P&Y's fair-chase standard on black bears, most of which are shot over bait. But P&Y won't accept any animal (baited or not) shot with a bow having over 65 percent effective let-off, though such gear is legal in far more places than baiting is.

No one questions that a private record-keeping organization can set its own rules. But with there being no single legal yardstick for ethical behavior in the woods, many whitetail hunters look to such groups for guidance on fair chase. When record-book rules run counter to state or provincial hunting laws, it's understandable that confusion reigns.

#### REGIONAL TRENDS

In earlier parts of this series, we broke down the responses to each question by location. In doing so, we found that the voting showed significant geographic variation — in some

cases, *extreme* variation.

Of course, this was to be expected, because not every practice listed on the survey is traditional or even legal everywhere. But the broad trends we saw still were interesting.

We combined all surveys from a given state or province and compared the total number of votes on all of the "yes/no" questions on those surveys. We then converted this to a percentage of "yes" answers. For instance, Mississippi readers cast a total of 716 "yes" votes and 269 "no" votes, giving their state an overall "score" of 73 (percent).

Here are the scores for every state or province from which we received completed surveys. (Note: As expected, we received fewer surveys from places with fewer readers, which tend to be places with fewer whitetail hunters. The more surveys received, the more reliable the results would tend to be. Thus, we have far more confidence in the numbers from Michigan than in those from Nova Scotia.)

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- 83: South Carolina, Rhode Island
- 81: Arkansas, New Brunswick
- 79: Georgia, Florida, North Carolina
- 78: Texas, Ontario
- 77: Washington
- 76: Tennessee
- 75: Missouri, Indiana, Oklahoma
- 74: Louisiana
- 73: Mississippi, West Virginia, Virginia, Massachusetts, Saskatchewan
- 72: Kentucky, Connecticut, New Hampshire, Delaware
- 71: Michigan, Alabama
- 70: Pennsylvania, New York, Ohio, Colorado
- 69: Wisconsin, Illinois, Kansas, South Dakota, Quebec
- 68: Vermont
- 67: Wyoming, Manitoba
- 66: Minnesota, Maine
- 65: Maryland
- 64: New Jersey, North Dakota
- 63: Montana, Alberta
- 62: Nebraska
- 61: Iowa
- 60: Idaho
- 59: British Columbia
- 41: Nova Scotia

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What can we make of these results? It's dangerous to generalize too much about what they mean, but one fact that stands out is that the highest scores tended to belong to Southern



*Some readers told us the primitive-weapons seasons should be limited to open-sighted "traditional" muzzleloaders, but most survey voters said they had no problem with in-line designs or scopes during such seasons. Photo by Tom Evans.*

states. In fact, no state in that region had a score of less than 71.

It's hard to fathom that there's a fundamental ethical difference between whitetail enthusiasts in the North and the South; people are people wherever you go. So, if there are regional differences in perspective on fair chase, perhaps they're due to the fact that deer habitat, land-ownership patterns and hunting laws vary so much by region.

In the South, the cover is often thick (and in many cases evergreen), there are few restrictions on hunting gear and methods, and a significant amount of deer hunting is done for a fee on private land far from major metropolitan areas. In the North, by contrast, a lot of hunting still occurs for free, whether on public land or on small tracts of private land, in areas of relatively high human populations. Relative to the amount of deer cover, hunter densities also tend to be higher, particularly in heavily farmed portions of the Northeast, Midwest and Great Plains. All of this not only makes the herd more vulnerable to hunting pressure, it also makes human safety a bigger concern. As a result, in those areas there tend to be more limitations on hunting gear (e.g., no centerfire rifles).

For assorted reasons, some deer herds can tolerate more manipulation than can others without apparent harm to the resource. This is particularly true in rural Southern areas with few restrictions on hunting/management methods, such as Texas. For example, consider the case of Texan Bobbie Brown, who participated in our survey.

"I have a ranch that's high-fenced, 7,000 acres, with food plots and supplemental feeding," he wrote. "I use spotlights for deer counts, limit hunting pressure, try to balance the buck:doe ratio, use ultra-long-range rifles and hunt almost every day of the season . . . and have not harvested a buck in eight years."

Bobbie's approach to deer management and hunting is far different from that of most other whitetail enthusiasts. But does that necessarily make it unethical? Not on the basis of its impact on the deer resource. In Texas, such management and hunting practices are widely used, and they have resulted in some of North America's healthiest herds. You'd have a hard time getting a South Texas rancher to listen to anyone's claim that an inten-

sive approach to deer management and hunting is the work of the devil. Yet in some other state, there might be a huge backlash against such practices.

Even with long rifle seasons, over-the-counter tags, liberal bag limits and sometimes even legalized baiting, many Southern states still have far more deer than they can support in good health. Thus, finding that many readers there have more relaxed views of fair chase was no surprise to us.

#### **FAIR TO THE DEER — OR TO OTHER HUNTERS?**

In this series, we've wrestled with the question of how to delineate fair chase. What we *haven't* discussed is a question that no longer can be ignored: Do we fret over the rules because we want to ensure our methods are fair to the deer — or because we don't want other hunters to have a competitive advantage on us?

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#### *Do we fret over the rules because we want to ensure our methods are fair to the deer — or because we don't want other hunters to have a competitive advantage on us?*

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For at least some folks, the answer apparently is a blend of the two. On the surveys, they frequently wrote that certain practices are for "lazy" hunters or that they go against tradition. In many cases, no claim was made that the herd or hunting's image was being harmed in the process.

It's prudent to be aware that non-hunters could view a practice with disfavor (a claim some of you made about high fences and huge deer drives). The general public's perception of hunting and management practices definitely should be a concern for all of us, so that point is well taken. But is that really what's eating at us when we hear that someone 150 miles from where we hunt legally used an airplane to scout a trophy, or that he shot a record buck over a legal bait pile? If either bothers us, only we as individuals really know why.

#### **FINAL THOUGHTS ON FAIR CHASE**

Hundreds of you who sent in surveys shared your own definitions of "fair chase" as it applies to whitetail hunting and management. Typical of many of these opinions was one given by Missouri reader Robert Freund,

who defined fair chase as "hunting deer in their own environment, when and where the animal has a greater chance of escape than the hunter has of making a kill."

To be honest, most of us don't hunt in a truly "natural" environment; the world is less "natural" every day. But that's not to say we should quit hunting, or that we've lost any hope of ever experiencing fair chase again. To a great extent, fair chase lies in the heart of the hunter, not in his choice of gear or tactic.

"One could say that when man picks up a weapon, fair chase ends — but rocks, spears, bows and arrows all are natural materials . . . so, maybe they're acceptable," wrote Benjamin Harrison III of Georgia. "Once we're over that hurdle, it's easy to accept simple, traditional technology such as guns, and harder to accept more recent/more exotic technology that places the quarry in greater jeopardy and requires less ability of the hunter. But fair chase means one thing to one man and something else to another."

As hunters and managers, we must pursue one great goal: to grow and then maintain a healthy herd in a way that the non-hunting majority find acceptable in terms of human safety and ethical treatment of animals. All of our practices — not just those affecting an animal's eligibility for the record book — must pass this test if hunting is to thrive.

Does that mean everyone must conform to a single set of rules to be an "ethical" hunter or manager? Perhaps not. Legally, it's up to each state or province to determine what's appropriate within its borders. All a wildlife agency is obligated to do is to set standards that make sense biologically and yet are palatable enough to the citizenry to be enforceable. Such standards might not be universal.

We all know what seems to work in our own woods, and we know we don't always agree with the way things are done elsewhere. Yet from Canada to Mexico, whitetail enthusiasts employ many varied practices, often without measurable harm to the species as a whole. If our special survey on fair chase has led us to any firm conclusion, it's that there's room for a variety of views on nearly any topic. Thankfully, in a free society, there always will be.

## BUILDING YOUR OWN 'DEER FACTORY'

# Manage Your Way To Better Hunting!

*The interest in managing private lands for whitetails has never been greater — and neither has our magazine's commitment to helping you do it right.*

Nearly three years have passed since *WHITETAIL* kicked off this series on managing private lands for deer. Back then, publishing detailed management advice was revolutionary, and to be honest, our approach to it still is; after all, we remain the only magazine with its own facility (Fort Perry Plantation in Georgia) devoted solely to deer-management research. The practical ideas we've been sharing since our October 1997 issue have been proved effective on Fort Perry's 2,000 acres, and we're confident they'll work on the land you hunt as well.

As we move into the 21st century, it's an appropriate time to review the principles we've been discussing since this series began. In doing so, we hope to help you assess where you are in your own management program and what your next step should be. And if you've not been trying to improve the herd you hunt, we'd love to help you get started. Once you've seen how easy and effective our program is, we really think you'll want to try it yourself.

### READER FEEDBACK

Among the most satisfying aspects of publishing this series has been the flood of positive response from readers everywhere. In the past three years, many of you have given us detailed reports on what you've been trying and the results you've seen.

This has been of great help to us here at *WHITETAIL*. For one thing, your input has confirmed beyond any doubt

*If the land you hunt is short on well-fed mature bucks, there are simple steps you can take to help the herd and your trophy prospects. Photo by R.E. Ilg.*

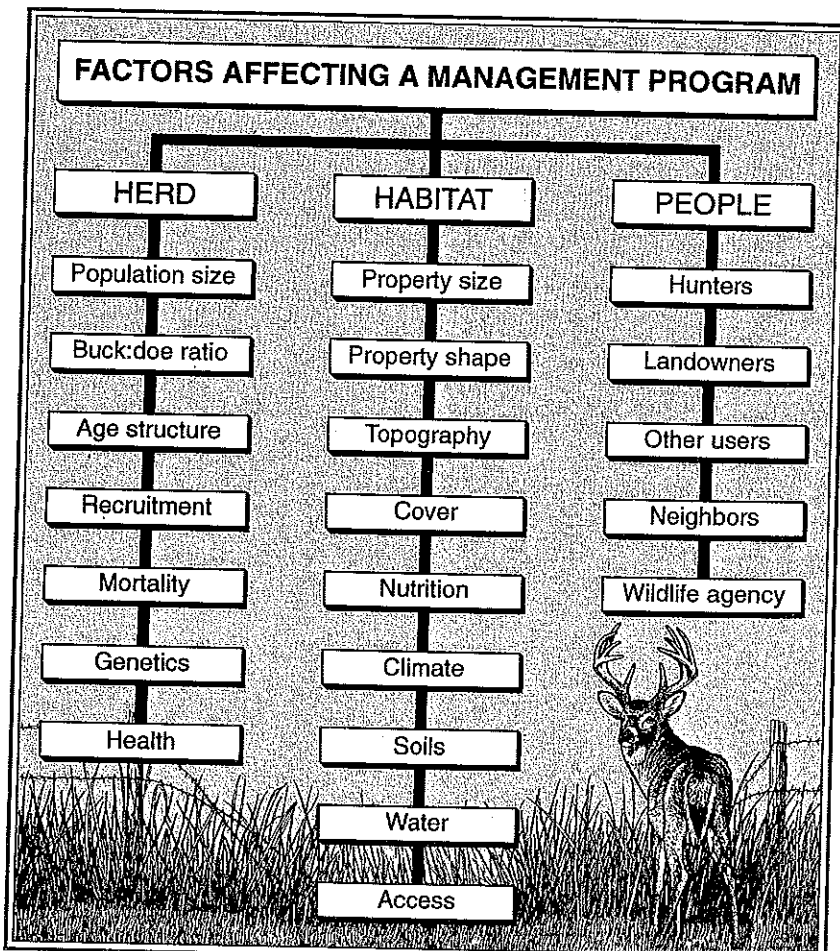
by Gordon Whittington

that the interest in deer management is widespread and growing. For another, you've helped us fine-tune our ideas for future articles on this subject. The more accurately we can identify the challenges you face in managing your

hunting land, the better we can focus our efforts on what matters most to you. We appreciate the feedback, and we hope you'll continue to provide it.

As this issue reaches you, we're not only between deer seasons but also between the spring and fall planting seasons for food plots. While this is seen by many hunters as a dead period,

*(Continued)*





it's actually a great time to assess management goals and strategies.

How do we go about that? By brushing up on our knowledge of what a healthy whitetail population is, then identifying the variables involved in producing and maintaining such a herd.

#### A WORKING DEFINITION OF "GOOD" MANAGEMENT

Whether you own a 2,000-acre farm in Iowa, lease hunting rights to 250 acres of Alabama timberland or hunt a neighbor's 18-acre Pennsylvania wood lot by invitation, you're already a deer manager. The choices you make in deciding how many of which deer to shoot — and perhaps in manipulating habitat as well — directly impact the health of the herd. And those effects, in turn, shape future prospects for you and whoever else hunts there.

As stewards of the environment, we hunters should make it a top priority to have a healthy deer herd. But what does that really mean? In our view here at *WHITETAIL*, a herd can be called healthy only if it's made up of the *right* number of the *right* ages of bucks and does on the *right* long-term diet. Deer

numbers and herd composition must be in balance with the forage supply and all other habitat factors.

It's reasonable to assume that before the start of the modern era, with its highly selective hunting pressure and relative lack of predators, our herds fit this description. They existed just as nature intended, which explains why we call them "natural" populations.

Unfortunately, when subjected to the above test, few herds today meet this standard. For starters, most populations now comprise too many does and not enough bucks. In addition, the average age of the bucks is nearly always too young. Thus, we're faced with unbalanced herds, particularly in areas with high hunting pressure biased toward buck harvest. Throw in the nutritional stress caused by too little year-round forage, and even the most dominant prime-age bucks tend to be smaller in antlers and body than their genetic potential would allow.

As responsible managers, we clearly should do what we can to rectify these problems. But how?

Job one is to achieve nutritional balance — in other words, give the

herd enough of the right food. This is how we ensure every deer is healthy and thus able to reach whatever size its age and genetic makeup will allow.

We can do this just by lowering deer numbers to match the current food supply; however, as we'll explain below, *WHITETAIL*'s unique forage-management strategy yields far more desirable results, by boosting nutrition so much that even a large number of deer can be well-fed.

But giving deer more and better forage doesn't magically make them older or turn does into bucks. To help the age structure and buck:doe ratio, we must use good *herd*-management strategies. In essence, what this comes down to is manipulating hunter harvest in a way that leads to a healthy herd.

Deer hunting is filled with decisions, and that's part of its appeal. But the cumulative result of every hunter's individual choices is a major impact on North America's overall whitetail resource. If the past half-century has taught us anything about deer hunters, it's that the average person who buys a license would rather shoot a little buck than a big doe. He might express a

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desire to kill a trophy buck, but for various reasons — lack of hunting time, lack of skill, perhaps even the belief that there aren't any big ones around — he'll try to kill the first antlered deer that gives him a shot. Play out this scenario a few million times each fall and you'll see why mature bucks (age 3 1/2 years or older) are scarce in many areas.

But just as indiscriminate harvest is the way to throw a herd out of balance, selective harvest is the way to fix it. By developing a population model for a herd (as discussed in past issues), we can see how hunting pressure needs to be redirected in order to improve both the buck:doe ratio and age structure.

If you combine proper harvest with great nutrition, you get the best of all whitetail worlds:

- more bucks overall, owing to higher fawn survival and lower hunting mortality of young bucks;
- more *mature* bucks, as a result of greater carryover of immature bucks into older age-classes;
- bigger racks and bodies in bucks of all ages, thanks to their better diet;
- more daytime buck activity and



*By consistently passing up immature bucks, New York's Daryl Duffy helps his local herd while also improving his odds of taking mature trophies. That discipline paid off with this big 5x5 in 1997. Photo courtesy of Daryl Duffy.*

- better rut hunting, owing to higher buck numbers and more competition for does; and finally,
- better odds that the bucks you're growing and protecting will stay on

your land during deer season, as a result of better year-round nutrition.

**THE FORT PERRY PROGRAM**

When we began managing Fort Perry Plantation in the late 1980s, we were seeking practical methods for growing large numbers of healthy deer on private land. We didn't know if it could be done, given the area's poor soils and low nutritional plane. But we succeeded — thanks to specific forage- and herd-management strategies you can use on your own hunting land.

The Fort Perry program is simple: We gave our herd a proper year-round diet (more protein in the warm season and more carbohydrates in the cool season, by planting good food plots, improving native habitat and providing some supplemental feed), and then let bucks mature before harvesting them.

This hardly seems like a revolutionary formula. But look deeper and you'll be amazed at what we learned through our research. By significantly boosting the amount and quality of deer forage — primarily with food plots — we pushed the habitat's productive capacity to far

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## MANAGEMENT . . . *Continued*

beyond what conventional wisdom suggests is possible. Indeed, we proved that it was possible to have far more deer than anyone previously thought, even as we were reducing the habitat and herd problems normally associated with such high densities. We actually *increased* size as we *increased* deer numbers — and to top it off, our native habitat *improved* in the process!

Next month, Dr. James C. Kroll and Ben Koerth of the Institute for White-tailed Deer Management and Research will discuss how to choose the best food-plot varieties for your situation, so you can strive to make similar progress. The two researchers also will offer advice on gauging the results of a forage program, helping you maximize your herd's benefits and minimize mistakes along the way.

In the meantime, let's list the many factors (shown on Page 35) that affect management of deer on private lands:

### HERD VARIABLES

No two populations are exactly alike, and their differences are expressed through "herd variables." If reasonably accurate, these estimates of a herd's size, composition and trends provide a

valuable snapshot of that population.

The first herd variable to try to get a handle on is total **population size**. That is, how many deer spend the majority of their time on the tract in question? Estimating this number, through the annual process of censusing, is one of the first steps in managing a herd.

What is the **buck:doe ratio**? As noted, buck-heavy hunting pressure is the main cause of unbalanced ratios, so

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*Yes, good management takes some time and resources. But no matter how much or how little of either commodity you invest, you can take satisfaction in knowing you're helping the herd.*

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an accurate assessment of the number of male and female deer in the herd helps us set harvest quotas for each.

**Age structure**, which we've also discussed, is another key variable. If mature bucks are rare in a herd, it's generally because of excessive harvest. (Natural mortality, even for bucks, is quite low in a well-managed herd.)

What are the **recruitment rate** and the **mortality rate**? That is, how many

deer are being added (mainly through reproduction, but perhaps also through immigration) and how many are being removed (by hunters, natural predators, disease, accidents, emigration, etc.)? If we don't know, it's hard to make sound harvest recommendations.

Much is made of the role **genetics** plays in controlling buck size, but in truth, most herds have decent genetic potential. The reason we often fail to see it is that most bucks die too young, and many are nutritionally stressed. Blaming "bad" genetics for poor antler and/or body development can lead you to overlook the *real* problems.

Finally, what's the overall **health** of individual deer in the herd? Are they in good shape, or is something (disease, parasites, malnutrition, etc.) degrading their physical well-being? If so, maybe you have a habitat problem to address.

### HABITAT VARIABLES

A herd's habitat is the sum total of the physical features making up its home range. Some are controlled by man, some aren't . . . and still others can fall into either category.

**Climate** patterns are fairly stable, though short-term patterns ("weather")



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can vary widely. Precipitation and temperature affect a herd's diet, activity and productivity, all of which must be figured into your management plan.

**Topography**, along with climate, controls the amount and placement of some other key habitat elements, including **water, cover and nutrition** (forage). Ideal habitat has plenty of each, though not all are equally crucial. (Deer drink surface water when it's available, but they get much of the moisture they need from their diet.)

Natural and human factors (swamps, sheer cliffs, roads, powerlines, fences, etc.) influence **access** to various parts of a tract, which can have a real impact on a management plan. (Try planting a 4-acre food plot without being able to get a tractor to that spot.) And without a doubt, the **size and shape** of the tract will influence your options and goals.

### "STAKEHOLDERS"

The attitudes and actions of humans play such major roles in any private-land management program that they must be analyzed as thoughtfully as the herd and its habitat. Failure to identify and account for these "stakeholders" almost always leads to frustration.

First up, of course, is the **landowner**, whose interests must be kept firmly in mind when implementing any sort of management plan. Then we have the **hunters**, a group that might or might not include the landowner. Everyone who hunts a given piece of land needs to be on the same page — especially when making harvest decisions.

What about **other users** of the land? This category might include the farmer to whom the fields have been rented, as well as the cattleman who's leased one of the pastures for grazing. In truth, all who go onto the property impact it on some level, and those effects can be either good or bad for deer.

Also, unless the tract encompasses an entire island or is surrounded by a game fence, **neighbors** will play some role in how well your efforts pan out. Those who are pro-management can help you a lot; those who are anti-management can hurt. Either way, understanding how their attitudes and activities affect you is important.

Finally, it's clear that your state or provincial **wildlife agency** has a huge say in your management options. After all, these agencies set season dates and bag limits and define legal weapon types and hunting methods, all of

which affect the size and composition of the deer harvest. Proper harvest is a key component of good management, so it's critical that wildlife officials provide us with the tools we need to do the job right.

### CONCLUSION

Yes, good management takes some time and resources. But no matter how much or how little of either commodity you invest, you can take satisfaction in knowing you're helping the herd. You might even find that managing land is just as much fun as pursuing the deer

on it! Plus, management is a year-round activity, letting you be involved with wildlife even when deer season is many long months away.

We take quite seriously our duty to help you succeed in these efforts. In fact, moving into the new century, our goal here at **WHITETAIL** remains the same as it was when this series began: to offer you sound information that's easy to understand and use. We're thrilled with the progress many of you have made to date . . . and we know there's still much more to come.

# AWESOME!

Using pyrotechnics,  
this **WASP HAMMER**  
SST was shot through  
**10 plates** fashioned  
from the walls of a **55-**  
gallon steel drum.

Stainless Steel "Smart Tip"  
three cutting edges pre-aligned with  
the rise of three razor sharp blades  
for maximum penetration.

The extra long "front foot"  
anchors the stainless steel blades  
under the tip where they belong.  
The blades won't dislodge or strip  
back, even after having been shot  
through the equivalent of 5/16"  
total thickness of steel.

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can vary widely. Precipitation and temperature affect a herd's diet, activity and productivity, all of which must be figured into your management plan.

**Topography**, along with climate, controls the amount and placement of some other key habitat elements, including **water**, **cover** and **nutrition** (forage). Ideal habitat has plenty of each, though not all are equally crucial. (Deer drink surface water when it's available, but they get much of the moisture they need from their diet.)

Natural and human factors (swamps, sheer cliffs, roads, powerlines, fences, etc.) influence **access** to various parts of a tract, which can have a real impact on a management plan. (Try planting a 4-acre food plot without being able to get a tractor to that spot.) And without a doubt, the **size** and **shape** of the tract will influence your options and goals.

#### "STAKEHOLDERS"

The attitudes and actions of humans play such major roles in any private-land management program that they must be analyzed as thoughtfully as the herd and its habitat. Failure to identify and account for these "stakeholders" almost always leads to frustration.

First up, of course, is the **landowner**, whose interests must be kept firmly in mind when implementing any sort of management plan. Then we have the **hunters**, a group that might or might not include the landowner. Everyone who hunts a given piece of land needs to be on the same page — especially when making harvest decisions.

What about **other users** of the land? This category might include the farmer to whom the fields have been rented, as well as the cattleman who's leased one of the pastures for grazing. In truth, all who go onto the property impact it on some level, and those effects can be either good or bad for deer.

Also, unless the tract encompasses an entire island or is surrounded by a game fence, **neighbors** will play some role in how well your efforts pan out. Those who are pro-management can help you a lot; those who are anti-management can hurt. Either way, understanding how their attitudes and activities affect you is important.

Finally, it's clear that your state or provincial **wildlife agency** has a huge say in your management options. After all, these agencies set season dates and bag limits and define legal weapon types and hunting methods, all of

which affect the size and composition of the deer harvest. Proper harvest is a key component of good management, so it's critical that wildlife officials provide us with the tools we need to do the job right.

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