

Woods for Game Hunting

The report of rifles in November is a familiar sound for the huntsmen of Michigan. Hunting for white-tailed deer is an integral part of Michigan culture, and a tradition often treated as a holiday. Our wonderful woods play an important role in this, as quality habitat means deer are much more likely to be present on opening day. Healthy forests provide ample food, clean water, and shelter from the elements for all manner of woodland creatures. Planning the future of your woods will keep it healthy and thriving, which will keep the herd returning.

What do deer need from the woods to keep coming back? The answer is pretty simple: food, water, shelter, and areas to raise young. Not every hunting ground has access to water, but food is something that you can manage your woodlot around. Deer love corn, much to the farmer's dismay, but that crops won't last them through the whole year. White-Tailed Deer, particularly bucks, have such a wide-ranging area they forage that they will very rarely stay on any individual property for the rut. The role that oaks have in providing a desirable place to forage makes them ideal for deer habitat, and proper managements of oaks can make any area a hotbed of activity. Food alone will not have them stay for long, shelter in many forms will help them stick around. Having cover on the forest floor helps hide deer and their fawns from predators, but also helps keep the winter winds from getting deep into the woods. While the wide-open, park-like woods are much easier to walk through, deer don't want to be seen by predators and will likely avoid these areas. Deer also use the forest understory for foraging leaves and berries, as well as for licking branches and creating scrapes. Having some evergreen trees also helps keep the temperature more pleasant in the woods, and you are more likely to have herds bed down in these areas.



It takes some work, but there is a lot that landowners can do to keep their woodland in good shape for hunting season. Oaks can have wide and sprawling canopies, which provide acorns in abundance if given space to grow. Focusing on keeping your best oak trees healthy and dominant in the woods is a great idea not only for the benefits to local wildlife, but also for adding value to timber harvesting in the future. A timber harvest in the woods can be a boon for hunters as well. Removing older trees will allow light to the forest floor, and the explosion of new green growth provides accessible food for wildlife and cover that deer need for shelter. However, there are a few things to consider before conducting a timber harvest for management.

Before you open the forest canopy with a timber harvest, consider what will regrow in the open space you have created. If you already have invasive species such as Autumn Olive, Multiflora Rose, invasive Honeysuckle, or Oriental Bittersweet in the understory, they will become an even worse nuisance if you remove trees and let more light in to them. For this reason, invasive species should be managed before conducting a timber harvest. Another issue that can be equally troublesome is if there is nothing growing underneath the older trees at all. In this case you may consider planting some desirable native understory trees or shrubs immediately following a harvest.

It can be difficult to figure out where to start, or what work needs to be done. Talking to a forester about your woods is a great first step! Landowners in Barry, Allegan, and Ottawa counties can call District Forester Ben Savoie for a free on-site assessment. Ben provides advice on forest management, as well as referrals to local professionals to help you get the work done right. You can reach the District Forester at 269-908-4134, or by email at ben.savoie@macd.org



This Month by the numbers:

Site Visits - 6

Site Visit Acreage - 62

Private Sector Referrals - 6

Public Sector Referrals - 4

Outreach Events - 1

Media Occurrences - 4

Open Referrals

None are open at this time. If you would like to be put on the referral list for local professional foresters, please let District Forester Ben Savoie know by calling 269-908-4134 or sending an email to ben.savoie@macd.org

