

PRACTICAL WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT INFORMATION



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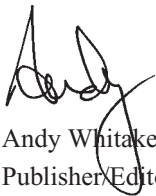




## Earl Says...

Summer is the toughest time of year to try to do any kind of wildlife management on your property but it can also be the most rewarding. As Dave Edwards tells us in his bi-monthly Management Calendar, the deer need as many nutrients as possible now because this is the prime antler growth period so that hopefully we'll see those "wall hangers" in the fall. What we do now can reap great rewards later even though the nasty, hot weather makes it tough to keep up our tractor time. And the hit and miss rain showers can reduce our efforts to acres of parched patches of dusty dirt. But keep plugged, everybody, hunting season will be upon us soon!

I'm hoping to see you all at the upcoming First Annual Land & Wildlife Expo August 12-14 at the Gaylord Opryland Resort & Convention Center in Nashville, TN. We'll be exhibiting there along with the good folks from The Wildlife Group. This should be a great show geared toward our target audience of landowners and land managers. And the list of the other exhibitors I've seen makes me believe this will be much more than just another deer hunting show. You'll be able to see everything from the latest game cameras and food plot mixes to pond management companies and farming equipment. And at the same time, the Quality Deer Management Association will be holding their National Convention there as well. Make your plans to attend and please come see us at our booth.

  
Andy Whitaker  
Publisher/Editor



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Cover photo by Ryan Basinger

# Herbicide Applications on a Large Scale

By Michelle Isenberg

Michelle has worked in the herbicide business since 1995. She was a BASF representative in both the forestry and wildlife markets for over 13 years in Alabama. In 2008, she entered into a partnership with Herbicides Plus and Custom Air. She works with private landowners, consultants and timber companies. Custom Air sprays throughout the entire Southeastern U.S. and works as well in the mid-west for farmers. She may be contacted either by email or phone. Michelle Isenberg-Associate Wildlife Biologist 256.749.3261 or [michelle.isenberg@customair.us](mailto:michelle.isenberg@customair.us)



**H**erbicide applications using helicopters or skidders may be something new to most landowners. Unlike the common occurrence of aerial application in crop rotations, landowners who manage for a mix of forestry and wildlife habitat may only utilize one of these types of application every few years. There are many different reasons why landowners need an herbicide application on their property.

Landowners who want to have herbicide work on their property may be surprised how easy the process can be. Whether it is how to contract the work or what to expect, this article is aimed at answering a few of those questions. Contracting spray work on your property may be the answer to accomplishing some of your forestry and wildlife management goals.

When considering a herbicide spray program on your property the first step is to identify the need you have and start planning immediately. Getting your land

sprayed in an effective manner takes time and mostly patience. If your intentions are to spray, start making arrangements with the person who manages your property, or if you are hands on, then you need to contract the work directly with a company which provides an application service.

Herbicide applicators start booking work early in the year, January 1. The sooner you contract with an applicator; you can rest assured that your property is in the logistics of that company to have your work performed. In the Southeastern U.S., there is not an abundance of applicators. All applicators work on a regional basis and usually have a longer range of travel than most landowners realize. Therefore, the applicator is working to effectively meet the needs of their customer, you the landowner, and work a well planned out route for the crews to follow.

The crew works on a basic timeline. However, throughout the spray season (June-November), weather by far is the biggest obstacle. When wind speeds reach in excess of 10mph, the job is shut down and the crew waits for the wind to slow. We do not spray in the rain, and shut down all operations if the rain is foreseen in the near future, i.e., 2 hours. As well, we fight the heat, such as the drought. And certain manufacturers require their products being sprayed before noon. Plants shut down in heat, therefore the herbicide may not have proper uptake. Many factors can slow down crews before they get to a job site, remember to have patience, the crew will get to you.

### **Types of Treatments**

There are different types of treatments that landowners contract application for on their property. Herbaceous weed control is sprayed in the spring of the year to control broadleaf weeds and grasses in newly planted plantations. Generally the first spring after planting is when herbaceous weed control is applied. Site preparation is the most



*Having current aerial photos of your property always helps to ensure proper application. As well, if the areas are delineated as spray areas, outlining the targeted areas helps the pilot. Remember, the pilot is flying by the information he is given.*



*The locator map helps the crew travel to the general area. The GPS coordinates guide the crews to the correct site.*



*The area outlined in Red is the targeted area to spray. The areas outlined in Blue are SMZ's (Stream Management Zones). The SMZ's will not be sprayed. This map helps to guide the pilot. Photo courtesy of Robert Sullivan.*

common application that is contracted in forestry. Site prep is after the trees have been clear-cut and the application is aimed at controlling hardwood trees and waxy competition. These treatments start in mid-June and end at leaf drop (fall). Release treatments begin as early as July 15 and also stop at leaf drop (fall). Release treatments control hardwood trees after planting if a site prep treatment was not done prior to planting. Mid-rotation treatments are sprayed on sites where hardwood competition is impacting the growth of older stands. Both release and mid-rotation treatments are either over-the-top of pines or under the canopy.

All of these applications are based upon the site situation and the landowner's objectives. After reviewing the site

and discussing the objectives with the landowner, a plan can begin. The type and amount of herbicide is then determined by the applicator in coordination with the landowner and the forester/manager. If the landowner is contracting directly with the applicator, then the applicator makes the best recommendation for the site which is called a *site prescription*. The site prescription consists of varying amounts of herbicides used in specific combinations to target the competition. The site prescription will also include the timing of the application, either early in the season or late.

### **Timing**

The spray season for application kicks off in early February with herbaceous weed control. These treatments

will run until mid-May. Early site preparation starts June 15. These site prep tracts were cut early the previous year and the vegetation is fully sprouted (hip high). August 1 is when the late session begins for site prep. Release spraying starts and overlaps with late site prep. Between the two, they will last until leaves on hardwoods begin to drop. This is the time when the majority of tracts in forestry are sprayed. It is essential to have your plan together early in the season. There are fewer acres that are sprayed early. If your tract is ready to be sprayed early, the window is greater in terms of timing to have an opportunity to burn, if desired.

Applicators will book work as early as possible to ensure a completed job. Contracting your work later in the year

puts your tracts behind other landowners who booked early in the season. If you know after the clear-cut your intentions are to spray, start working with your forester or applicator to ensure your site is sprayed.

### **Equipment**

Helicopters are the work horses of forestry. What surprises most landowners is that we do not use fixed wing aircraft in forestry! We only use helicopters. Also, skidders or rubber tire tractors are utilized for ground applications. Ground backpack crews are utilized in certain situations mainly where a helicopter is not a good fit. An applicator

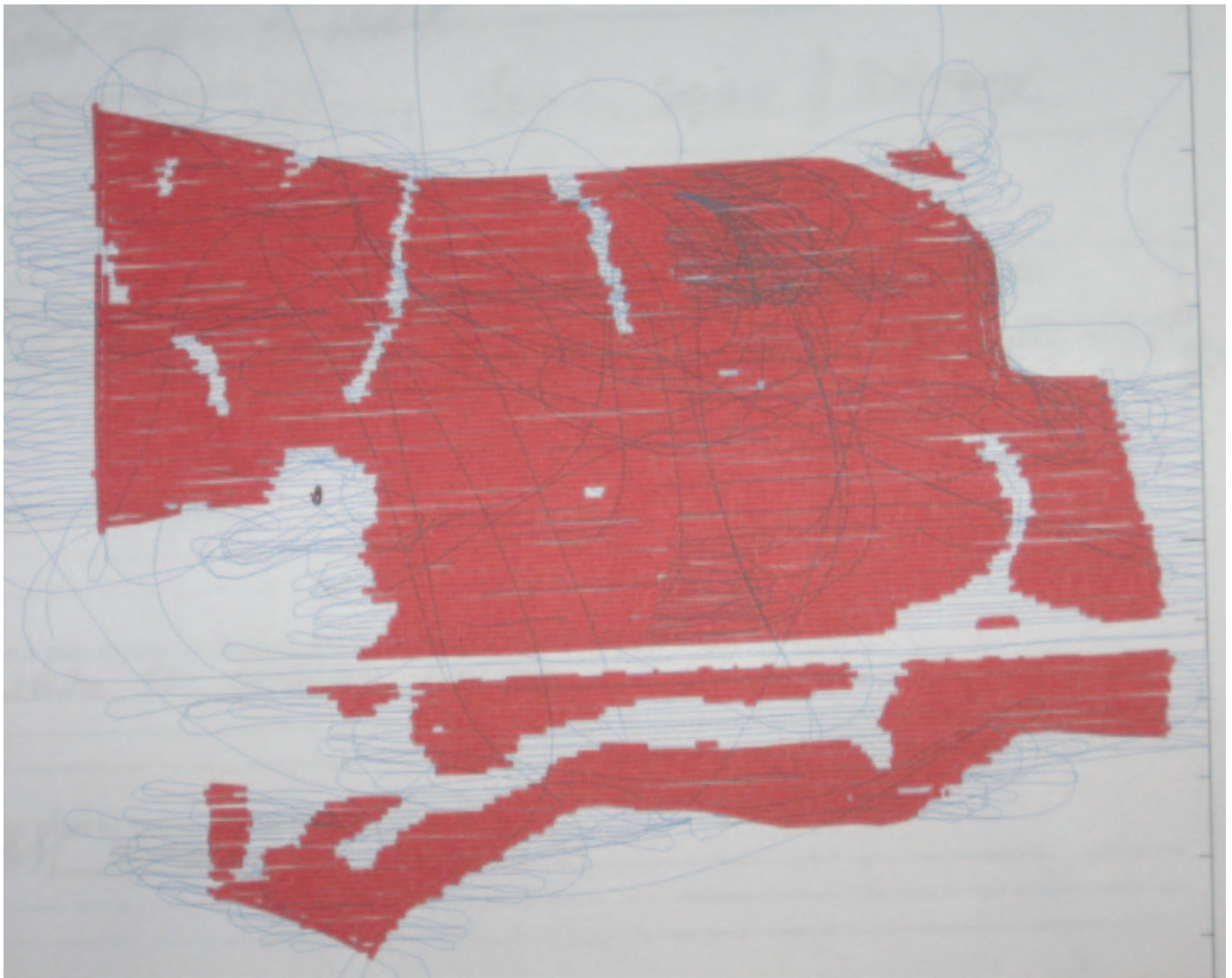
will let you know when they look at your site whether or not you should seek an alternative method of application.

Contrary to popular belief, helicopters spray more acres and tend to be the cheapest per acre for application vs. a ground backpack crew. The reason is the production. A helicopter can spray 500+/- acres on a good spray day. A ground skidder can produce around 75-90 acres per day. And a large backpack crew can spray up to 50 acres per day. Production is the driver when determining costs. However, a ground crew may be needed where a helicopter is unable to go. Small areas that have sensitive areas will require a hand crew. But

overall, the helicopter is the main application vehicle in the forestry industry.

### **Production**

Application crews work on a logistical plan to optimize output. This in turn requires a tremendous amount of coordination on the ground. The application business is a very fluid environment. As I stated earlier, the weather affects the business every day. Rain and wind speed are the two most important factors in getting work completed. In years of hurricane activity, production can be impacted greatly. Most hurricane activity occurs in the fall of the year. Hurricane season coincides with late



*This is the spray map which is generated by the computer on board of the helicopter. The Red lines are the passes made by the helicopter with the spray boom on. The Blue lines are the flight path of the helicopter with the spray boom off. You can compare the before and after and clearly see the outline of the tract and the SMZ's. Photo courtesy of Robert Sullivan.*

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season spraying which is when the bulk of the acres are treated. That is a good reason to have your property scheduled for an early treatment starting June 15. It not only helps you to avoid bad weather delaying your application, but it opens up your window for burning. If you are planning to burn after your site prep treatment, earlier treatments are always better. You have more time throughout the growing season to burn your site after the spray job.

With the amount of acres that are sprayed in a single season, one of the most crucial factors of achieving a successful spray job is coordination and information exchange. When tracts are contracted, other tracts in the general area are lumped together to spray during the same time frame. A logistics coordinator plans the routes through the areas and picks up as many tracts as possible. This allows the crews to be more productive.

In general a crew consists of the pilot, a turnkey manager and one or two water trucks. The pilot is the boss of the crew and the job. If the pilot sees something from the air that we do not see on the ground, he has the final say in shutting down a job. Any sensitive areas need to be discussed ahead of the crew arriving on site. This enables the flow of information to get to the pilot so he knows what to expect. The turnkey manager is responsible for the herbicides arriving on site and directing the entire crew on the logistics of the jobs. He

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also coordinates water requirements from local sources. Depending on the crew, there may be one or two water trucks that are involved with the job. Usually one is placed with the helicopter and the second one is at the next tract awaiting the helicopter. This allows for production to be increased, cutting down on travel time waiting for a single water truck.

### **Maps**

Applicators work off maps that landowners provide. The area manager visits the site ahead of the crew writing the prescription for herbicides and obtaining all the necessary site information.

The crew and pilot rely heavily on the information that is provided to them. Therefore, the better the information, the smoother the job will flow. Good aerial maps and photos with the targeted spray areas delineated by lines are needed. If you can put in fire lanes prior to the spray it is always helpful but not necessary. GPS points are required to find the tract by both air and ground. As well, if certain areas on the tract should not be sprayed, it is important to have those marked on the map. Looking at a tract from the air is completely different than looking at it from the ground. You need to have any sensitive areas marked on the map, such as adjacent crop

fields, food plots, houses, groves of oaks, ponds, anything and everything that needs to be avoided by the application. The maps are the pilot's guide to the entire job. It is helpful to have a thorough map ready for the area manager upon arrival for the initial visit.

### **Latitude/Longitude**

The latitude and longitude of the tract is how we find it. The pilot can fly straight to the tract and wait for the batch truck and crew to arrive. In that time he will fly the tract and look for anything out of the ordinary and can ask you about it before the job starts. As well, the crew finds the tract by the



*Usually a trailer will be pulled on site which carries the herbicide. Note the limited clearance. Good roads are imperative for the crew to arrive on site.*

Lat/Lon coordinates. The area manager ensures the accuracy of the points visiting the site prior to the crew's arrival. With GPS technology available, this is critical to performing the job.

### **Water bars**

Water bars on tracts are extremely important for water diversion purposes. However, with aerial applications water bars are very difficult for the batch trucks to clear. The batch trucks carry the water to the site and usually they are 3000 gallon water trucks. The clearance is very low. So take into consideration

when having aerial applications that the water truck needs to have access to the site. If there is no access without crossing large water bars, generally a LZ (landing zone) can be found on an alternate area or perhaps with permission of an adjacent landowner. When your site was logged, log trucks leaving a site have different clearance than a water truck. With the shorter axle, batch trucks cannot necessarily access the site the same way log trucks left. This needs to be discussed and determined prior to the crew's arrival. The area manager will help with this and ensure proper access.

### **Water source**

Most crews are familiar with local water sources. The water source comes from local water authorities, with permission granted prior to the application. Sometimes general information on a local water authority may be needed. The area manager will ask the landowner should this be needed. With the amount of water required to spray a site, water sources will be identified well before the application takes place. If your land is in an area where water is difficult to obtain, we will look for alternate sources further away.



*This photo depicts a common LZ (Landing Zone). Generally this is located on the loading deck, but other alternate areas may be better. Photo courtesy of Robert Sullivan.*



*This is the sink effect the helicopter makes after leaving the top of the batch truck fully loaded. This is why we need plenty of clearance so the pilot can have a 'runway' to begin the lift. Photo courtesy of Robert Sullivan.*

## **GPS**

Sophisticated GPS systems are in both helicopters and skidders for tracking the spray job. The GPS accomplishes many goals. First, GPS identifies and confirms the site to be sprayed. The Lat/Lon that is provided before the spray job is matched to the equipment on board to ensure the accuracy of the location. Second, a GPS map is provided to the landowner after the spray job with the pattern of the application. This allows the landowner to see the areas of their property that were sprayed. If certain sensitive areas were to be left out, the landowner can see firsthand that they were not sprayed. The GPS guid-



*The batch truck is where the pilot receives the herbicide load and fuel. The helicopter lands on the platform on top. Note the limited clearance and weight. Good roads always helps the crew.*

ance system guides the pilot or operator through-out the tract to ensure an accurate application.

### Landing Zones

The LZ (landing zone) is where the batch truck, crew truck and helicopter congregate. This area is usually found on the tract. However, sometimes this area can be located off the specific tract to be sprayed. This is determined prior to the spray job to ensure entrance to the spray site. In the case of a LZ for a helicopter, several factors are examined. The pilot needs plenty of clearance up and away from the batch truck to both depart and land. What is important to know about a LZ is that helicopters do not lift straight into the air after loading. When they land on top of the batch truck and begin their lift, there is a sink of the helicopter which takes place. As they sink, they slowly begin to lift in a runway fashion. Note the picture of the sinking action by the helicopter; this is why a large area is required free of standing trees or any other objects.

The helicopter will land directly on top of the batch truck to be refilled with a new load. A load will consist of 10 acres at a time if a 10 gallon per acre (GPA) mix is being used. If 15 gallons per acre (GPA) is prescribed then the load will be a little over 6 acres. If the tract is a perfect 100 acres at 10 GPA, then the helicopter will take off and land 10 times. This is why the LZ needs to be accessible on all sides of the batch truck. If large standing trees are in the way, sometimes a chainsaw will be used to fell trees to allow good access. Also, if a LZ is located on adjacent property, a good ferry length for the helicopter is less than one half mile. It's important to know where a potential LZ could be located on either your property or with the permission of an adjacent landowner.

### Costs

What is the cost for these types of applications? That is one of the most common questions that landowners ask associated with application. Each tract is

looked at and a cost is given at that time. Costs are hard to determine without a site inspection and all the pertinent information about the type of treatment. Should a landowner commit to an application on their property, the area manager will visit the site and discuss all the possible options. If the landowner has a forester who will handle the application, then the forester can make the necessary arrangements to have the site visited and cost projections can be discussed at that time.

### Successful Applications

As each landowner has his or her own set of objectives, the applications on your property may vary. Should you need help deciding what you should do, seek help and ask questions. Each day landowners are considering different techniques and methods to achieve their objectives. Those answers are available for you, so do not hesitate to ask. Remember, have patience and communicate your objectives and goals to your application company.

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# American Beaver: Nature's Architects Or Nuisance Engineers?

By Kevin Patterson

Kevin Patterson is C.E.O. and president of Predator Control Systems, LLC. He has a B.S. in Wildlife Biology and has 30 years of experience in predator control work. He conducts predator control work throughout the south, southeast and Midwestern United States.



*A 67 pound adult sow beaver which had been damming up a creek and flooding valuable timber in south central Alabama*

**A**merican Beaver (*Castor canadensis*) are the largest living rodents in North America and the second largest member of the rodent family in the world, after the capybara of South America. The American beaver's closest relative is the Eurasian beaver (*Castor fiber*). The majority of adult beaver average between 40 - 60 pounds; however, some have been harvested that weighed in excess of 100 pounds. Beaver are herbivorous, meaning that their diet consists primarily of plant materials and aquatic vegetation such as tree bark, leaves, twigs, roots and buds.

Mating season occurs from January through March. Beaver communicate in a diversity of ways, including using vocalizations, postures, scent marking and slapping their tail on the water. A female (sow) beaver's gestation period is approximately 105 days with "kits" born between April and June. Sow beaver average giving birth to approximately two to four "kits", but have been known to birth as many as

eight. Kits are nursed until they are approximately 10 to 12 weeks of age, at which time after weaning, their diet consists of vegetation. Most beaver kits remain with their mother until they are about two years old. The beaver's family unit is termed a "colony", containing from two to 12 individuals. A colony usually consists of the adult breeding pair, kits of the current year and kits from the previous year. Depending on which research study you read, the lifespan of a beaver in the wild averages approximately five to 15 years.

During the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, beaver were intensively sought after, trapped and killed for their fur, which was utilized as currency for a period of time. Numerous historians have credited the early exploitation of beaver fur to contributing more to the development of the United States and Canada (North America) than any other animal. They are the national animal of Canada and are depicted on the Canadian nickel. Many wildlife biologists consider the beaver to be the most adept, naturally instinctive engineer in the animal kingdom.

Beaver construct "dams" with materials such as mud, twigs, rocks, brush, vegetation, etc., to create and provide themselves with an adequate food sup-

ply and safe haven to live and raise their young. No matter where they meet, it is inevitable that conflicts will arise between humans and beaver; the two species most adept at altering the natural world to suit their own needs. Both humans and beaver have built structures which can be seen from space. The Great Wall of China and a one-half-mile long beaver dam in Alberta, Canada, measuring approximately 2,790 feet (850 meters), are prime examples.

Due to their size, independent behavior and habitat that they utilize, beaver have few enemies; however, the most common predators of beaver are humans, bobcats, coyotes and bears. Many predator trappers, including myself, will sometimes utilize the carcass of beaver, tainted beaver meat and/or beaver castor scent when luring bobcats and coyotes, which find beaver to be a delicacy in their carnivorous diets. Additionally, beaver and their fur bearing predators frequent the same type of habitat (i.e. brush, timber, waterways, etc.). While trapping and snaring predators, I have personally caught numerous bobcats and coyotes adjacent to and even on top of existing beaver dams.

When most private land managers

hear someone say, "beaver", they immediately think that some poor landowner has a serious problem and it needs immediate attention! I used to think the exact same thoughts; however, after spending many years in forest, fish and wildlife protection and management, I am now initially inclined to ask the wildlife manager, "what are the primary focus areas of your private land management program?" I have learned to approach each individual management program with an open mind, especially when it comes to the presence of beaver.

Beaver can provide both benefits and adverse affects, depending on their location and the particular private land management program. For example, if someone's priority is solely managing their property for generating and harvesting crops, particularly timber and various grains, the presence of beaver residing on these properties will inherently pose a conflict. However, if someone's priority is to manage their property for waterfowl habitat, the presence of beaver just may be a welcome addition in aiding the land manager with maintaining flooded timber, marshes, wetlands, etc. In turn, if a private land manager's wishes are to generate and maintain habitat on their property to



*A two-year old beaver which had been causing significant crop damage along the Missouri River in Montana*

accommodate a diversity of wildlife and game species such as rabbit, quail, waterfowl, wild turkey and whitetail deer, beaver would serve as an important benefit but the proper and consistent management of their populations on these properties would be a must!

### **Beaver Eradication vs. Beaver Management**

When one takes on the task of beaver eradication, they first need to accept the fact that if the property currently has beaver, along with suitable beaver habitat, the eradication effort will need to be swift and consistent. Once a colony of beaver have been eradicated, the manager will need to immediately remove all dams, lodges, and existing food caches (pronounced as cash-es) because it may only be a matter of time before another pair of beaver move into the unoccupied habitat and establish a new colony. Additionally, consistent

surveillance of possible new beaver sign, along with professional trapping and/or snaring efforts will need to become an integral part of your annual wildlife management plan.

I have personally conducted beaver eradication for numerous private landowners, most of whom had a few acres with one to two existing impoundments. Usually with this type of situation, you are faced with only one to three colonies of beaver at most. An experienced and proficient beaver trapper can usually have these few beaver removed within one to two weeks, depending on the current beaver activity.

Beaver management would be more conducive and realistic for a property which encases several acres of optimum beaver habitat. Optimum beaver habitat would include timbered lowlands and an annual water supply, such as a river, impoundment(s) and/or a spring-fed creek. A consistent effort of harvesting

a significant number of beaver each winter and early spring from these properties will most likely be the best approach for the land manager. The private land manager should always remember that no matter what the priority focus of their individual management plan, consistency and longevity of utilizing Best Management Practices (BMP) are key components in maintaining overall success. There is no quick fix in wildlife management!

Every year, numerous landowners who have beaver present on their property spend a significant amount of time, money and effort in attempting to destroy the beaver's habitat (i.e. dams, lodges, etc.), thinking that the beaver will raise their white flag in submission and merely pack up and move somewhere else. Unfortunately, due to the beaver's natural instincts, these landowners are quickly educated to the fact that beaver will waste little time in re-

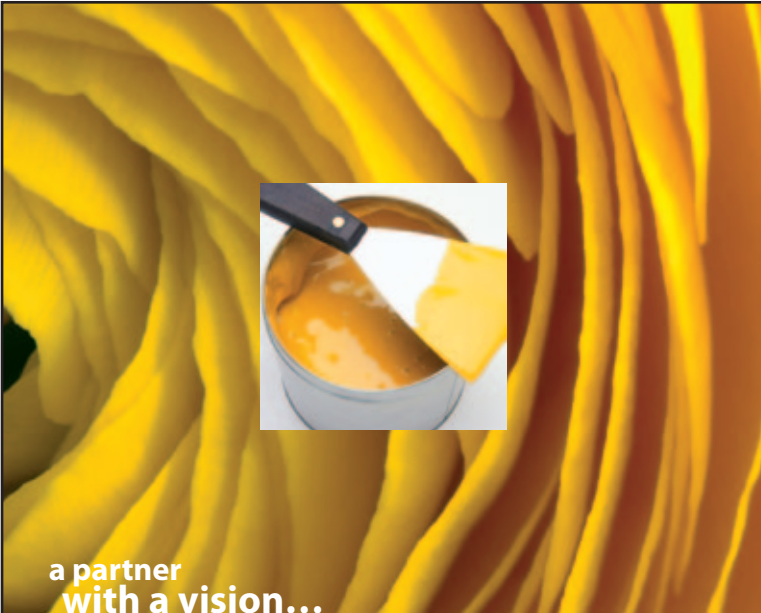


*Removing beaver dams, debris, etc., immediately following the removal of beaver on small impoundments is essential to eradication efforts*



building their dams, etc., and that their efforts would have been better spent with a different approach. Additionally, the monetary savings for land managers who initially utilize the correct and most feasible approach to beaver control issues (i.e. eradication vs. management) can be substantial. Being thoroughly knowledgeable regarding your options of resources and proven management practices is essential.


For several years, I would take a few weeks of vacation from my job to conduct predator and beaver control work for private landowners. One Mississippi landowner, who owned and managed several hundred acres, specifically for timber, various grains, whitetail deer, wild turkey and bobwhite quail, would have me focus heavily on one particular area on his farm to decrease the existing beaver population. This area was comprised of a mix of timber and lowland grain fields. Additionally, a creek ran through the middle of the property. Every year, one particular portion of the creek would flood the timber and grain fields due to beaver damming the creek channel. Each year, I would harvest around 25 – 40 beaver from this approximate one-quarter mile section of creek. Once I had completed my work, the landowner would utilize a track hoe to dredge the creek of all existing beaver dams, food caches, lodges and brush. With the beaver gone, debris removed, and the water



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*Thorough scouting and inspection of beaver lodges like this one are only part of a beaver trappers job*

receded to normal levels, the landowner would be able to plant the bottom fields the next spring and also protect, selectively manage and harvest his existing timber crop.

The above story is a prime example of utilizing beaver management in satisfactorily overcoming the land management conflict which these beaver presented. Due to the existing habitat, which was optimum for beaver and the large acreage, the most logical method for the landowner to achieve his land management objective was to, annually, remove the majority of beaver which inhabited this particular area; therefore receding the water levels from the grain fields and timber. Yes, other beaver would eventually move into this section of creek each year but the landowner was also able to annually cultivate, plant and harvest his grain crops. Each year, I would harvest this particular beaver population during February,

which was approximately two months prior to planting season. "Timing" of when these beaver were removed, etc., proved to be a very important element of this management plan.

### **Public Health Concerns**

Beaver regularly defecate in water, and their droppings may cause a flu-like infection when contaminated water is ingested. The scientific name for this illness is, "giardiasis", although more commonly referred to in the scientific world as, "giardia" (pronounced as g-ar-di-a). Another popular term among the non-scientific community is, "beaver fever". Giardia has been documented in many animal species, including domestic pets, livestock and wildlife; however, it has never been scientifically determined that the type of giardia, which beaver carry, causes giardiasis in humans.

Beaver can also be infected with the bacterial disease, "tularemia".

Tularemia transmitted to animals by biting flies, ticks or drinking contaminated water can be fatal. Animals who contract this disease may appear to be sluggish, tame, and/or unable to run when disturbed. Tularemia is commonly transferred to humans by the ingestion of contaminated water, eating undercooked and/or infected meat (especially pork), or by inhaling dust from soil which is contaminated with the bacteria. Humans infected with this bacterial disease often have symptoms of a high fever, nausea, headache, body ache and sweats. The above-mentioned health concerns, regarding the presence of beaver, solidifies the benefits of generating and following proven wildlife management practices. You never know what has been "upstream" when you are drinking water "downstream".

Anyone who has trapped beaver for a significant period of time will, undoubtedly, have stories to tell of

strange and unusual predicaments which they found themselves. While trapping and snaring for beaver, I have caught numerous “non-target” species, including fish, snakes, turtles, myself and alligators...Yes, ALLIGATORS! My first experience in coming face-to-face with a live alligator found me knee deep in stagnant waters in a southwest Mississippi bayou. I was conducting beaver management for a private landowner and was in the process of placing a 330-Conibear trap in the entrance to a beaver den when I began hearing, what sounded like, hen turkey’s yelping. Being very cognizant of the fact that I was leaned forward in knee deep water and scared of anything that has fangs

and a temper, I froze. It finally occurred to me that I had approximately a dozen baby alligators swimming between and around my legs who were calling for “Momma”! Have you ever gotten the feeling that someone or something was staring a hole through you? Well, I had that same feeling and promptly removed myself and my trap from this unnerving situation.

Due to the unfortunate fact that raw fur, including beaver, is no longer a profitable quest for the outdoors-man, the number of active beaver trappers today has drastically declined from previous years. This fact, in itself, poses a significant wildlife and private land management concern. If any wildlife

species’ population is not maintained to acceptable levels; either by natural selection, predation, and/or human intervention, their numbers will increase beyond the carrying capacity with which any property can sustain. However, most state and federal conservation agencies still provide their services in assisting private landowners with managing wildlife damage issues, such as beaver eradication and management. If you are searching for a private individual(s) who are experienced and proficient in this type of work, I strongly suggest that you require multiple references from previous work history prior to committing to a contract. Good luck with your wildlife management efforts!



*Alligators, where present, also utilize the same habitat as beaver. This 6 1/2-foot adult male alligator decided to visit a beaver den which had already been set up with a 330-Conibear trap in central Mississippi. The alligator was uninjured and released after inspection by biologists*

# Fish Population Diversity for Pond Owners with Multiple Ponds

By Matt Euten

Matt Euten works as a fisheries biologist for Southeastern Pond Management in Birmingham, AL. He earned his Masters degree in fisheries science from Auburn University where he studied the recruitment and growth of largemouth, smallmouth and spotted bass. Contact him at [meuten@sepond.com](mailto:meuten@sepond.com).



*Creating a forage pond above your trophy bass lake can help grow monster bass such as this 11 pounder.*

If you were to go inside the head of any outdoorsman, you would most likely see a common dream for the perfect piece of property. This property would consist of several thousand acres of the richest soil that is teeming with the most abundant wildlife populations imaginable. In the center of the expanse would sit a majestic log cabin overlooking the most premier largemouth bass fishing lake in the country. Is your mouth watering yet? Well believe it or not, there exists such places and for many of you reading this article, I may have just described your current weekend getaway. So what's next for you sportsmen that already have it all? I can give you more, well at least for your fish populations! We can enhance your dream property by either adding more lakes and stocking them with different but equally exciting fish populations or just enhancing the management of the property if you have multiple ponds. For those of you wanting more diversity, I have a number of different

stocking options for a property with multiple lakes or ponds.

Probably the most economical of the multiple pond options is to create a "Forage Pond". The "Forage Pond" option is created by stocking only forage fish species such as coppernose bluegill, threadfin shad and/or golden shiners and you allow them to spawn several times throughout the growing season. Then in the fall you release the forage into your primary bass lake, which provides loads of food for your bass before winter. This only works if the forage pond is located close enough to the bass lake and you can drain the water and empty the fish completely into the bass lake each year. With no predators, the pond can fill up with the perfect sized forage and in late October/November, emptying this forage into your bass lake will create a Thanksgiving buffet like no other. Annually stocking forage each year to create a trophy bass fishery can be quite expensive. However, if you can grow and stock your own by utilizing a "Forage Pond", your results for growing trophy bass are limitless.

The "Forage Pond" option doesn't necessarily give you a different catchable variety for your property, but the benefit of providing the amount of forage a brood pond can produce each year will create some of the fattest bass possible. If you have a smaller pond or you can create one above your bass lake, then I would highly recommend trying the "Forage Pond" option at least one time. Size doesn't matter in the case of a forage pond, however the bigger the pond, the more forage you can produce. One thing to remember, you cannot let any predator fish find its way into your brood pond or the production of forage will be limited. Also, for maximum return on your investment, initiating an intense fertilization and supplemental feeding program is imperative to increasing the biomass of the pond. I have several clients who have implemented the forage pond program

and they have seen amazing results in terms of bass growth. One client in particular told me he fished one afternoon in an area where he emptied his two forage ponds into his bass lake a few days after he released the forage. He was so excited and said his bass catch rates were amazing and that the bass were attacking everything that hit the water. It was one of the best fishing days he had ever had. An advantage to exploring the "Forage Pond" option is that if after you have grown forage and released them into the bass lake and you are not as pleased with the results as you would like, then the pond can

easily be converted to another option at any time.

Let's say you don't have the right conditions for creating the "Forage Pond" option. There are other combinations of different fish species that will create diversity for your property. The most popular among the different "multiple pond" options is creating a "Trophy Bluegill" pond. If you enjoy watching the piranha-esk feeding patterns and growing and catching those hand-sized behemoth bull bream, then the "Trophy Bluegill" option is right up your alley. Just as with the "Forage Pond", the size of the lake doesn't mat-



*Producing hand-sized bluegill that weigh over a pound is the result from intensely managing a "Trophy Bluegill" pond.*



*Feed-trained largemouth bass are highly aggressive and are a great option for those anglers looking for fast action bass fishing.*

ter when considering creating a trophy bluegill fishery.

To create the “Trophy Bluegill” pond, it is best to start with a clean slate and I always recommend eradicating the existing fish population and restock with fingerling copperside bluegill, redear sunfish, and largemouth bass. If it is not possible to remove the existing fish population, we can usually work with what is there. The key to growing trophy bluegill in ponds is by providing a supplemental high protein pelleted feed daily and maintaining a bass-crowded lake. This bass-crowded condition will create a stunting affect

among bass, where the largest bass is usually no larger than 14 inches. The bluegill that escape predation and grow larger than what a 14-inch bass can eat will essentially have no threat of predation and can focus its energy solely on growth. Also, these stunted bass will consistently consume the small bluegill hatched each month, leaving no competition for available food for your larger bluegill. The combination of stunted bass and an intense supplemental feeding program is the perfect recipe for massive bluegill growth.

Management of a “Trophy Bluegill” pond is slightly different than that of a

traditional balanced pond. However, fertilization will remain the same. To get the maximum growth from your bluegill, installing automatic fish feeders and feeding a relatively higher protein fish food is imperative. Bass harvest should be suspended if a larger bass, one greater than 14 inches, is caught then it should be either removed for table fare or transferred into another pond. Bluegill can be harvested, however occasionally intermediate sized (3-5 inches) or larger bluegill will need to be restocked to help supplement the lack of successful recruitment among the bluegill population in a “Trophy Bluegill” pond.

Ok, the “Trophy Bluegill” option sounds tempting, but you don’t want to sacrifice bass growth and you would also like a lake capable of high catch rates. In this case, it is best to stock your lake like the “Trophy Bluegill” pond, but instead we will substitute the traditional stocking of fingerling F1-largemouth bass with adult feed-trained Northern Bass. The “Feed-Trained Bass” option creates a lake with the most aggressive bass and bluegill possible, which means catch rates will be through the roof! Because these two species readily train to pelleted feed, multiple feeders filled with high protein food can push growth rates to the limit. The “Feed-Trained Bass” pond should be fertilized regularly and annual electrofishing evaluations are recommended to determine the reproductive success and to set harvest rates and limits.

Maybe your management program has already created somewhat of a trophy bluegill pond in your primary bass lake and the “trophy-bluegill” option is not as alluring and you would like something outside the box. My suggestion would be to go with the “Crappie Pond” option. No you did not read it wrong, not “crappy”, but “crappie.” I know we have all said crappie are bad for ponds, but let me explain. Crappie can be problematic in a bass/bluegill

pond, but without competition for forage we have seen some impressive results from the “Crappie Pond” option. Successful crappie reproduction in ponds is highly variable and that makes their management tough when coupled with a healthy reproducing bass population. I have seen ponds where the crappie population did not reproduce for 5 years, but on that sixth year a successful spawn and recruitment led to an overcrowded predator population and a completely ruined trophy bass lake. So in your bass pond, crappie are a no, no!

However, if you have a pond or lake that is completely void of fish or the pond can be drained and the fish population eradicated, then do I have a crappie recipe for you! To create the “Crappie Pond” of your dreams, you must first load it up with the right type of forage, which are fathead minnows, threadfin shad and golden shiners. Once this forage has had a chance to reproduce and become robust, then you stock intermediate-sized crappie. Naturally, there exists two subspecies in



Two of several crappie collected during an evaluation of one of our crappie ponds.

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*The hybrid-striped bass grow fast on a high protein diet and can really “stretch your string”.*

the crappie family; white crappie and black crappie. However a cross between these two subspecies has resulted in a “hybrid” crappie or “first generation cross”, which has been used to stock in ponds. This cross usually has a black stripe running down its nose and is sometimes called the “black-nosed crappie”. With many of our crappie lakes we have observed lower reproduction rates among these “hybrids”, which has helped with the management of the population. Also, to help control the crappies’ unpredictable reproductive success, we stock hybrid striped bass in relatively low numbers. The hybrid striped bass readily feed on the forage

species stocked. However, during those years of increased crappie recruitment, these bass will reduce the crappie numbers and help maintain a balance between predator and prey.

Management of the “Crappie Pond” is fairly simple, but it is advisable to have the lake evaluated each year to ensure balanced conditions among the predators and prey species is maintained. Initiating intensive supplemental feeding and fertilization programs is beneficial to ensuring a healthy robust forage population. Harvest rates for crappie will most likely be based on your stocking rates and how successful reproduction among the crappie population is each

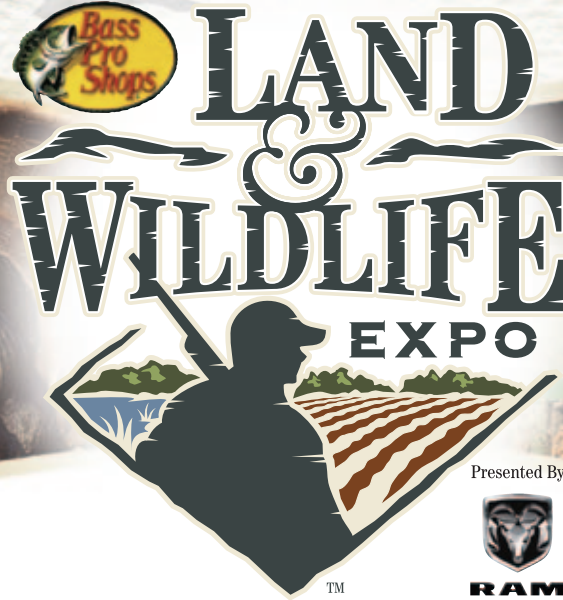
year. Catch rates for both the crappie and hybrid striped bass are relatively high in our crappie ponds. Increasing the amount of available structure will help congregate the fish which can also help increase your catch rates.

The final option for those of you who have multiple ponds and are looking to find diversity for your lakes is to create a “Hybrid Pond”. This pond is not for the faint of heart and it is geared for those fishermen who like fast action fly fishing or who just get fired up about a fish busting every lure that hits the water. The “Hybrid Pond” is stocked with hybrid striped bass, northern largemouth bass, coppernose bluegill and threadfin shad. All these species, except threadfin shad, are highly aggressive and readily train to a pelleted feed. Growth rates are unbelievable when high protein fish food, that which is greater than 40 percent protein, is regularly fed to the fish. Catch rates in the “Hybrid Pond” are excellent and for the most part you can’t keep a hook in the water long enough to stay wet. You can opt out of stocking the largemouth bass and just have hybrids and bluegill; however, more hybrids per acre will need to be stocked to ensure acceptable catch rates. Fish growth in the “Hybrid Pond” is mostly based on the amount of food you provide and the more you feed the better your chances of having a pond full of “footballs”. Fertilization is highly recommended, particularly to ensure an ample food supply for the threadfin shad population.

There are many different options for managing properties that have multiple ponds where creating diverse fish populations is the ultimate goal. Given the fact that many freshwater fish can coexist, combining them to create what you as the pond owner desires is fairly easy and this makes the possibilities endless. The examples above are just a few successful combinations we have experimented with over the years, give me a shout and let’s see what we can do in your ponds.



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# Common Pitfalls of High-fence Properties: Part II

By Stephen Ditchkoff

Stephen Ditchkoff is an associate Professor at Auburn University. At Auburn, Steve teaches both undergraduate and graduate courses in Wildlife Science and conducts research with white-tailed deer and wild pigs. He can be contacted at 334-844-9240 or [ditchss@auburn.edu](mailto:ditchss@auburn.edu).



*This high-fence property has enough acreage in food plots that some plots can be “protected” with electric fencing and opened up at a later date. This ensures that there is high quality forage available throughout the summer.*

**H**igh-fence properties can be extraordinary examples of well-managed deer populations, and large-antlered deer and high quality hunting opportunities make them extremely popular to some hunters and landowners. However, many high-fence properties make similar mistakes in their management practices. In the last issue of *Wildlife Trends* we discussed some common pitfalls of high-fence properties regarding supplemental feeding, fence construction, and monitoring of your deer herd. In this issue, we’ll discuss additional pitfalls that you should attempt to avoid with your high-fence property.

## **Habitat Quality**

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Most high-fence facilities that I have toured have had fairly poor habitat quality. This is in part a function of the high density of deer that is in the facility, and the

resulting overbrowsing of the habitat. However, it is also a function of the fact that many high-fence managers feel that because supplemental feed has been provided, there is no need to worry about forage production or habitat quality. While not necessary from a nutritional perspective, I feel that the following suggestions can pay dividends when managing a high-fence.

### Prescribed Fire

Prescribed fire is likely the most underutilized tool in the wildlife man-

ager's toolbox. This is especially unfortunate considering that it is probably the most cost effective tool for managing white-tailed deer habitat. Prescribed fire is very effective at increasing browse quality and quantity in southern habitats. It serves to suppress growth of many undesirable woody and herbaceous plants, and promotes growth of desirable, low-growing species such as legumes. The overall impact of using prescribed fire is often a much thicker, herbaceous understory, and improved nutritional quality of those plants that

are present. In addition to improving the nutritional plane of the deer in your facility, it can help reduce costs associated with supplemental feed.

The improved herbaceous understory created with prescribed fire also improves fawning habitat. Most high-fence facilities are characterized by bare ground in the wooded portion of the landscape. This is due to the mature hardwood and pine overstories that are present. Prescribed fire, while not a solution all its own, can help to improve groundcover in both pine and hardwood



*Harvesting enough antlerless deer inside a high fence facility can be difficult, and it takes considerable effort to harvest enough.*



*One of the greatest difficulties with high-fence properties is harvesting enough bucks. The desire to see what he looks like next year can result in too few bucks being harvested.*

habitats. Also, if you're going to burn, consider the season that you conduct the burn. Ask an expert about the benefits of growing season versus dormant season burns. More and more evidence suggests that growing season burns are more beneficial than dormant season burns for enhancing wildlife habitat.

### **Timber Harvest**

Timber harvest can be an extremely beneficial aspect to any land management strategy. Removal of mature timber allows sunlight to reach the forest floor, resulting in increased growth of herbaceous and woody plants, thereby providing increased quality and quantity of forage for deer. The problem is that mature forests with open understories are aesthetically pleasing and provide a sense of grandeur to landowners and

their guests. As a result, many landowners are often hesitant to thin these areas and negatively impact the allure of these stands. As with prescribed fire, timber removal will result in cost savings due to increased availability of natural forages and resulting nutritional benefits. In addition, timber removal can generate significant levels of income that can be used to supplement costs associated with deer management.

### **Food Plots**

In my opinion, most high-fence properties do not put enough acreage into food plots. One property I work with has approximately 20% of the acreage as food plots. This high acreage of food plots has a significant effect on body mass and antler development, as it provides a year round source of very high

quality forage at a fraction the expense of supplemental feed. Additionally, because the forage is spread out and not concentrated in the same manner as supplemental feed at a feeder, the deer truly experience free choice and no deer is left wanting. Properties with only 5% of the acreage in food plots are paying more money in feed, and some deer are likely not getting quite what they need.

Lower acreages of food plots also do not allow for crops to be planted in stages. For example, if enough acreage is available, a landowner can plant iron and clay peas at 3 different times, thus having different fields mature at different stages during the growing season when protein intake is most critical. This ensures that there are warm season plots available throughout the summer. In most cases, summer plots are

browsed over by August, which could be argued is the most important nutritional period of the year for deer. In August-September, does are lactating, which is the most nutritionally demanding aspect of deer biology. By ensuring that there is high quality forage available in food plots throughout the entire growing season, you are making an investment into the future of your herd. If fawn growth is maximized during this period, it will translate into greater body size and antler development in subsequent years.

Food plot spacing is important as well. In most cases, food plots spacing is a function of convenience, and food plots are located wherever there is an unwooded area. Additionally, it is much easier to plant fewer, larger plots than many small plots. But, spreading out your plots into smaller plots (food plots of 1-3 acres ) will provide deer greater access, and the small size will allow them to feel more comfortable when using the plots. More plots also means that you can plant in stages, and be sure that there is forage available throughout the season. Plant some plots early in the season, some so that they will mature in the middle of summer, and some so that they will mature in late summer so there is high quality forage available during August-September. Finally, with smaller plots, you can control deer access. Most landowners plant food plots and allow deer to use them at will. But, there are some fairly simple, yet proven techniques for keeping deer out of food plots until they are more mature and forage production is maximized. This is more easily accomplished with smaller plots than larger.

## **Harvest**

### **Antlerless Harvest**

Antlerless harvest is a major component of any deer management program, and is no less important inside of a high-fence. However, many high-fence owners fail to keep doe numbers in check...even though they think they are

doing a good job. If you see does regularly while hunting, then you have too many does. The nature of most high-fence properties is that they experience considerable hunting pressure. This means that your deer are educated and become wary of hunters. Over time they learn to avoid prime hunting locations and become very good at avoiding harvest. In all probability, there are does on your property that have been evading hunters for years and are passing on their wisdom to their offspring. This means that you need to shoot most every doe you see to ensure that you are harvesting enough does to keep the population at desired levels. I understand that this harvest philosophy can cause severe heartburn for a landowner, but trust me in that it is almost impossible to overharvest does in a high-fence property (or unfenced property). Because of the high nutritional plane of your property, you can expect high fawn production and survival, and the does you harvest will quickly be replaced.

### **Buck Harvest**

This may come as a surprise, but even more difficult than harvesting enough antlerless deer is harvesting enough bucks. Deer hunters are fascinated by antlers. There is something about antlers that turns us all to Jello. Even the most experienced and savvy hunter cannot pass up the opportunity to pick up a shed from even a spike-antlered deer. The problem with high-fence properties is that these facilities infuse a “disease” in high-fence owners: every high-fence owner wants to know what “that deer” will look like next year. If you own or hunt in a high fence, then you have the disease...you might have the disease even if you aren't fortunate enough to hunt in a high-fence facility. The problem lies in the fact that we become scared to shoot a buck because of the fear that it could be our next trophy. We continually pass up sub-trophy bucks in the hope that they

will be of trophy class next year or the year after. The result is that many properties are overrun with bucks. While this may sound like a great problem to have, it can create problems.

The more bucks on a property, the greater the level of competition. There will be more fighting and competition for food, and the result will be decreased growth and survival. Increased agonistic behavior among male deer results in greater levels of stress, which can manifest itself in reduced growth rates, decreased antler development, and compromised immune systems. My point is that you need to harvest bucks...more than just the trophy class animals. There needs to be an effort to harvest bucks that are not in the trophy class. I'm not a big fan of culling on properties that are not bound by a high-fence because it is very difficult to identify which bucks are of high quality and which are low quality from a genetic perspective. Outside of a high-fence, the presence of even low quality, mature bucks provides a benefit to the herd (See *Wildlife Trends*, Volume 9, Issue 5). But, inside of a high-fence, keeping these animals because they might make next-year's trophy can be a mistake. Mature (animals 3.5 years of age or older) bucks that do not exhibit antler development consistent with other deer should be removed from the herd. I would even go so far as to suggest that 1.5 and 2.5 year old deer that exhibit subpar antler development should be harvested. There needs to be a conscious effort to harvest a sufficient number of bucks each year that do not fall into the trophy category. I'm not suggesting that you shoot every “sub-trophy” animal in the population. Rather, I am suggesting that you need to make a conscious effort to harvest 15-20% of your buck population annually. This is the basis for the “management buck” that you regularly see harvested in television. These landowners understand the need to remove a sufficient number of bucks each year, and

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## Exotics

Every high-fence property across the Southeast was built for white-tailed deer. White-tailed deer are the focal point of both management and hunting in this region. However, there are some high-fence owners that can't resist the urge to supplement their facility with some form of exotic species. These species may include, but are not limited to, axis deer, red deer, fallow deer and various species of antelope. Some properties have bison and other large horned species from across the globe. Without question, the addition of these animals creates a unique faunal assemblage that provides wonderful viewing and hunting opportunities that could only be realized by traveling to other parts of North America or overseas.

The problem with exotic animals in a high-fence facility is that they compete with your deer for access to resources. Feed consumption by many of these species substantially exceeds that of deer. Many of these species competitively exclude white-tailed deer, meaning that they dominate preferred food resources and



*Exotic species such as these bison can provide an enjoyable novelty for high-fence properties. However, the presence of exotics can hamper management efforts.*

negatively affect the nutritional plane of your deer. While the novelty of exotic animals makes them very attractive as a potential addition to your high-fence facility, most high-fence owners that have made such an investment will admit that it was a mistake. Once the novelty wears off and it's realized that they need to be removed from the facility, it's difficult to fully commit to eradicating an animal that was a considerable financial investment. Additionally, it can be difficult to completely eliminate some of these populations once they have become established.

### **Friends and Acquaintances**

If you already have a high-fence property, then you already realize just how popular you are. If you are considering purchasing one, then you will soon be amazed at how many people want to be your friend. Not long ago, I was fortunate enough to own a lake

house. I was continually amazed at how many people that were casual acquaintances (maybe talked with 3 or 4 times a year) were willing to sacrifice their time to keep me company at the lake. If you haven't already experienced it, this is the same sort of love and adoration you can count on if you own a high-fence.

There are going to be many people willing to ride your coattails in the hopes of spending some time amongst your herd. You're going to be put in an awkward position more than you wish regarding the exploitation of your deer herd. What are you going to do when a casual friend shoots one of your prized deer that you had anticipated would be a 180-class deer? Does it matter that he knew not to shoot that deer? What if a friend can't resist shooting 4-year-old, 10-point frames when these are the breeder bucks of your program and you said he could only shoot mature 8-points? What I am describing here is

the norm. My point is that you are going to have to be very strict with regards to the use of your facility. While there are undoubtedly some friends that are willing to invest their time and resources into the management of the property, the majority will be in it for the hunt. Use caution when opening up your property to "unproven" friends, and be prepared to draw a hard line...even with "proven" friends.

### **Conclusions**

High-fence facilities are great for producing high quality deer. But, to successfully produce a high quality deer herd in a high-fence requires attention to detail, as well as an eye on common pitfalls. Don't fall into the trap (as many do) of thinking that a high-fence automatically equates to trophy deer. Keep in mind the common pitfalls described in this article and you will maximize your management success.

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# Management Calendar



*Planting successful fall food plots is a process that takes place over several weeks versus a weekend project. This field is being harrowed for the second time to continue preparing a smooth seed bed.*

August and September are often busy months on recreational properties. As the growing season is coming to an end, many other management activities are on tap in preparation for fall plantings and hunting season. For those that enjoy “tractor therapy”, fall is your time of year as many of the calen-

dar activities over the next couple months will require some seat time. As you are planning and implementing late summer/ fall management projects, I encourage you to include those who will be enjoying your property with you later in the fall, particularly kids and friends. Being a part of the management is a

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great learning experience for most and it heightens the enjoyment of hunts if they have helped manage the land, plant the food plot, or place the deer stand.

### **Service tractors, ATV's, and other mechanical tools.**

Because early fall is a busy period for equipment use such as tractors, ATV's, and chainsaws, now is a great time to perform maintenance or service. I recommend developing a maintenance sheet that includes all your equipment and keeping records of service. This will ensure that equipment is taken care of and will be in good working order for the fall activities such as food plot planting and preparing your property for hunting season. Don't forget about tractor implements such as grain drills, mowers, or harrows. We even keep a maintenance sheet for small tools like weedeaters and pressure washers.

### **Manage dove fields in preparation for the upcoming season.**

Common dove field crops include dove proso millet, browntop millet, Japanese millet, sunflowers, grain sorghum, corn, and wheat. Dove field planting activities should be done a few months before dove season, but will depend on the time it takes for the specific crop you plant to mature. It is important to know how long it will take for the crop you plant to mature and produce seed. The goal is to have mature seed available for dove a few weeks before the season starts to allow them time to find and begin using the field. Besides providing a crop with abundant seed for dove, below are a few



things I have learned that improve dove use of fields and/or improve hunting experiences.

Maintain a clean disked strip or two through the field of bare ground. These are strips that you do not plant, rather simply keep plowed through the summer and into dove season. Dove find these bare dirt areas attractive because it is easy to walk in, exposes seeds, grit, and offers dusting areas. Disked strips offer access to seed from your plantings once they mature as well.

If you do not already have “pea gravel” (very small grit stone) along roads that either run through or around the field, add it. Dove are attracted to this gravel because they need grit in their gizzard to assist in digestion of seeds and other food sources. If you pay attention to where you see dove on the way to work, you will notice they are often along roadsides that have exposed dirt/grit, dirt/gravel parking lots or plowed fields. If you’re not paying too much attention, however, you are seeing them on power lines that overlook these places. I learned this trick of enhancing dove fields with pea gravel by accident. I had a client that wanted a boat landing on a lake that was adjacent to his dove field. We used pea gravel to make the landing. Because we had extra gravel, we spread it along a road that went through the field. When I drove through the field a couple weeks later, hundreds of dove flew up from the road. There were so many that I got out of my truck to check for cracked corn! No corn. They were simply using the grit in the gravel. Since then I have incorporated pea gravel in dove field management if there is not already a source in or around the field with great success. They are simply attracted to it. Pea gravel is relatively cheap – give it a try.

Once the crop is mature begin periodic strip mowing or sectional burning to allow access and expose seed to dove. I prefer burning if it is possible because it completely cleans the ground allowing better access for dove and exposes

more seed. Only a few strips are needed at any one time. The goal is to only mow/expose enough seed for dove to use for a week or so. Add another strip or burn another section as dove need it. This method will prolong the life of your dove field by providing seed to dove over several weeks or months.

Regardless of your management efforts, dove can be unpredictable and be here today and there tomorrow which can be quite frustrating. Dove fields are kind of like boats...it’s nice to have a friend with a dove field! However, providing a very attractive field with everything a dove needs will

increase your chances of holding more dove and having better shoots.

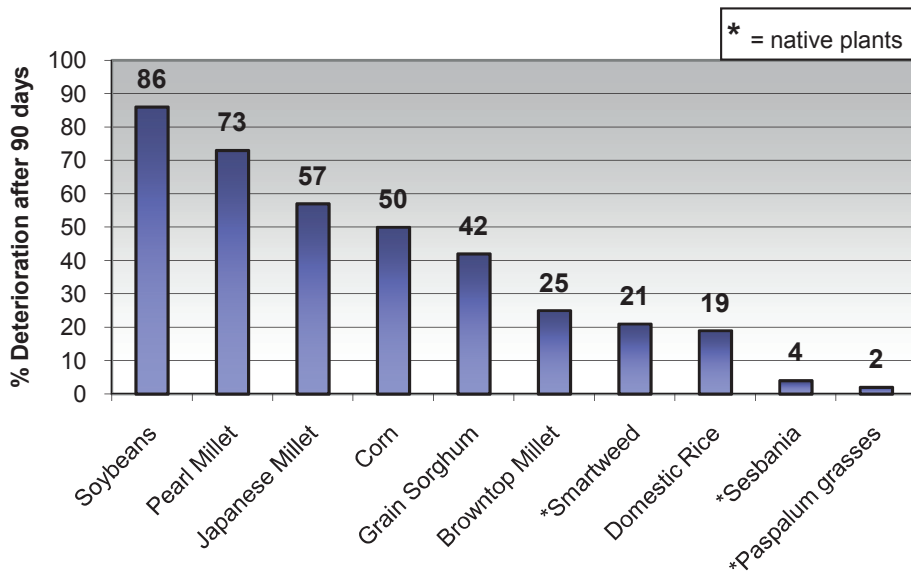
### **Begin flooding duck ponds in early September.**

Teal are usually the first ducks coming down the flyways as they migrate south for winter. Although it depends on where your property is located, you should expect to start seeing teal in late August through mid-September. To accommodate these waterfowl and/or to attract them for the early teal hunting season, flood at least 30% of your duck pond. To be most attractive, make sure there are some open water areas within



*Dove fields can be a great place to introduce new hunters to the sport. Our annual dove hunt is something my boys look forward to each year.*

## Percentage Deterioration of Submerged Seeds



the flooded area. The main reason for not flooding the entire duck pond is to delay seed deterioration caused by flooding. Seed deterioration rates, or the amount of time it takes for a seed to break down after being flooded, vary among different plant species. Most native wetland plant seeds are well adapted to flooded conditions and will last up to 3 months under water. However, most agriculture crop seeds break down much quicker. Thus, you only want to flood enough of your pond to provide early arriving teal with a food resource. Begin flooding the remainder of the pond in late October for the main flight of ducks. This will ensure the seeds you've worked hard to produce will remain longer into the winter to provide food and attract ducks. If you have never shot early season teal, you're missing out. Teal respond to calling and work decoys well and they fly in fast, tight flocks which makes for some fast and furious shooting – notice I said shooting and not killing!! – they are tough to hit!

### **Start preparations for fall food plots.**

It is difficult, if not impossible, to establish successful food plots without

preparation. Planting quality food plots is a process that may span over several months, not a weekend. There are several factors that influence the success of a food plot program. Among the most important are establishing a well thought out food plot plan, ensuring proper soil fertility and pH, preparing a firm, smooth seed bed, only planting under favorable conditions, and controlling weeds. Each of these activities plays an important role in the success of your food plots. Here are a few tips on planting this fall:

- Test soil early and apply required lime (preferably at least 6 months prior to planting). It takes time for the chemical process to take place and effectively change the soil pH. If you didn't lime in spring or early summer, go ahead and apply it now...better late than never.
- Use the results of the soil test to create the best fertilizer blend for your specific soil needs. Many people use balanced fertilizers such as 13-13-13 because they are easy. However, it is well worth your time to custom blend fertilizer to match your needs verses applying a balanced fertilizer that often requires applying extremely high amounts of

some nutrients to compensate for the lack of others in the soil – which results in wasted fertilizer/ wasted money.

- Order seed and fertilizer as early as possible to ensure it is ready when you are.
- Ensure plots are relatively smooth. This takes time and should be done well ahead of planting dates. If you are broadcast planting, simply drag the field just before planting to provide good seed-soil contact. A culti-packer is very useful for this as well.
- Have your seed beds ready, but don't fall into the trap of planting too early. September is often a very dry month. Mid-October is ideal in most areas of the southeast. This is when we start getting regular cold fronts that bring rain. Planting too early normally results in disease (mostly army worms), poor planting success due to droughty conditions, or if you receive adequate rain the food plot is knee high and less attractive to deer by the time gun season arrives.
- Adding annual reseeding clovers such as crimson or arrowleaf into your fall plantings will increase the quality, nutritional value, and longevity of your food plots. With proper management, these clovers will regenerate again next fall which will save you money on seed costs.
- Use exclusion cages to monitor deer use and plot performance. An exclusion cage is a small "tube" of fence staked to the plot that is used to keep deer from eating the crop in a very small area. Cages are normally 2-3' foot in diameter and 3-4' tall. This prevents deer from eating the crop within the exclusion cage which allows you to assess plot growth and deer use of the plot. I've seen many food plots where the manager thought the crop did not do well, where in fact it did but deer simply mowed it down and never gave it a chance to grow.



*Wildflowers can be a great addition to your property that enhances both aesthetics and turkey habitat.*

### **Prepare areas to plant wildflowers.**

Those that have read many of my management calendars know that I like planting wildflowers. There are many reasons I am a fan of wildflowers. Establishing wildflower areas not only enhance the aesthetics of a property, but provide excellent foraging areas for turkeys and quail. The wildflowers attract a multitude of insects which are high in protein. Insects are the primary food source for turkey and quail chicks which require a high protein diet. Adults consume many insects as well. The best time to establish a wildflower area is in the fall. I recommend a mix that is suited for your area that includes annuals and perennials. If properly managed, wildflower areas are easily maintained for several years. If you are creating a new wildflower area, prepare the ground just as if you were planting

a food plot. That is, create a smooth, firm, clean seedbed. Refer to the planting instructions for the mix you plan to use. Most blends recommend planting well into fall after temperatures have dropped some to prevent germination of the perennials until spring. If you already have wildflower areas, you probably have a few flowers that will persist through late summer, but most have faded. Assess the wildflower areas. If bad weed problems exist (over 50% of the area is covered with weeds), mow the area then apply a broadleaf selective herbicide a couple weeks later once the weeds are actively growing again. However, if possible (if the weeds are not overwhelming), allow the area to sit until early to mid September. Holding off and applying this management strategy in September will provide more protection for fall wildflowers that

will be germinating soon. Mowing the area will scatter seed and stimulate germination.

### **Host a BBQ dinner for your neighbors.**

Whether you already know your neighbors or not, inviting them to a cookout at your property will not only be a good gesture, but will likely result in new or better relationships that will benefit wildlife on your property. Late summer or early fall is a great time to host this because hunting season is right around the corner and on people's minds. These are great events to exchange ideas, share management experiences, (what has worked and what has not), discuss any problems such as poaching or trespassing issues, or simply getting to know each other better. In most cases, successful deer

management, particularly on small properties, requires working with adjacent landowners or hunters to ensure similar herd management strategies are being applied. When several properties are working together towards common goals it is often referred to as a “deer management cooperative”. Obviously the goal is to get as many landowners and hunters to participate as possible so that you have “control of the deer herd” over a larger area. Given the relatively large home range sizes of white-tailed deer, the more land under management the better, and any increase in acreage

will improve management success. Other non-biological benefits of getting to know your neighbors may include sharing resources such as tractors, planting efforts, or other equipment. Many neighbors save money by ordering bulk fertilizer, seed, and supplemental feed. I’ve known of several great friendships that have developed through “neighborhood” cookouts.

### **Check and oil gates & locks**

Servicing gates and locks are often overlooked, but is something that needs to be done at least annually. Unattended

or poorly working gates can pose unnecessary safety hazards. The first order of business when servicing a gate, particularly one that is not used often, is to inspect for and eradicate wasps and their nests. Nothing can put a damper on a day in the woods like getting stung by a wasp at the gate! Next ensure the gate functions properly. Is it easily opened and swings level? Are the hinges in good working order? Make notes of parts needed to make repairs if you do not have them handy. To reduce the chances of running into a “no-shoulders” (snake), ensure the gate is free of



*Safety first! Checking and repairing deer stands should be an annual activity.*



tall weeds and vines by weedeating or using herbicide (recommended). Lastly, inspect and oil the lock, locking mechanism, and hinges of the gate.

### **Check, repair and place new hunting stands**

While the best time of year to relocate or place new deer stands on your property is in late winter after the deer season has ended or very early spring (before green up), late summer or early fall is when you need to revisit these stands to tighten them back up, inspect for loose nuts/bolts, rotten or loose wood, or any other safety hazards. This is also a good time to check the shooting rails, padding, and trim shooting lanes where needed in preparation for hunting season. However, do not overdo the shooting lanes. Small openings are all that is normally needed to identify and shoot deer. Because we have so many deer stands on the property I hunt, we have started using flagging as a way of ensuring each stand is safe. That is, once a stand is checked, tightened, etc, we simply tie a piece of colored flag-

ging on the base of the stand or the ladder. We use a different color each year. For example, this year we are using blue flagging. So if you get to a stand this fall that does not have a piece of blue flagging on it, you know that it has not been through “final inspection” this year and to use caution if you use it.

### **Mow under and around fruit trees and orchards.**

Mowing around fruit trees will not only enhance the growth of the trees by reducing competition for resources by surrounding plants, but will enhance the aesthetics of your property. Mowing will also help “clean” the understory around the fruit trees so wildlife can find the fruit as it drops in the fall (acorns, persimmons, apples, etc). As fruit or nuts begin to fall, these areas provide great places to hang a trail camera to get pictures of wildlife using the trees.

### **Limb roads**

Because the growing season is essentially over, late summer or early fall is a

great time to trim over-hanging limbs from your property’s interior roadways. Interior or secondary roads can become a jungle in just one growing season if not maintained. Have you ever ripped the exhaust pipe off your tractor with an over hanging limb, or had a limb slap you across the face while driving a golf cart down an overgrown road? Trimming limbs will help prevent equipment damage and/or personal injuries while using these roads. Removing these limbs will help these roads dry out quicker by allowing sunlight and wind exposure on the road and in some cases will enhance natural wildlife foods along the roadsides due to the added sunlight.

### **Develop a pre-season deer harvest plan that will maintain or improve your deer management program.**

Monitoring the status of your deer herd is the backbone to the success of your deer program. Hopefully, you have been collecting harvest data (weights, measurements, ages, etc),



hunter observation data, as well as conducting camera surveys. Collectively, this information is used to make sound deer management decisions that will help you achieve the goals of your program. If you haven't already done so, ask a wildlife biologist to review your data or information and provide harvest recommendations before hunting season starts. Using trail cameras is a great way to assess buck quality and make buck harvest decisions before you head to the woods. Pictures from trail cameras will help reduce "mistakes" when judging bucks in the woods while hunting, (where judgments are often made in seconds while your heart is racing 200 beats per minute). While trail cameras are useful, a true camera survey is the most accurate method available to assess the status of your deer herd. September and October are normally the best months to conduct a camera survey (after bucks shed velvet but before the majority of acorns start to drop). If you plan to conduct a survey this fall, be sure to plan ahead. If you are doing it yourself, begin gathering all the equipment and supplies needed (cameras, batteries, digital cards, film, corn, etc). If you plan to hire a professional, get on their schedule early. With the popularity of camera surveys, most wildlife consulting companies are booked well in advance of camera survey season (September – November).

*Trail cameras are an excellent tool for assessing the success of your deer management program and making harvest decisions before hunting season.*



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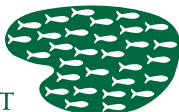


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