

Whitetail Deer Hunting & Land Management Plan

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Prepared for –

March 2019

Dear Landowner,

This land management and deer hunting plan was prepared with the idea that your primary objective with the property is to consistently harvest mature whitetail bucks. Some of the ideas that I have outlined may seem extreme but in my experience those hunters who are willing to go to extreme measures are the ones that consistently tag trophy bucks.

When I walked your property and put together this plan, I did so with the same mind-set as if I owned it and would be hunting it myself. **What I have outlined here is exactly what I would do if I owned the land**. As the real landowner, you will have to decide how far you wish to take this project and which (if any) of my recommendations you will implement. Rest assured that nobody wants you to succeed more than I do as there is no better advertisement for my services than a landowner who is pleased with the results.

The first part of this plan will deal with the specifics of your property. The aerial photo of your property will be marked to reflect habitat improvement suggestions. Don't consider this endeavor to be a short term "fix-it-all-now" project with instant-magical results. With these habitat improvement projects implemented, each season should see improvements in the quality of the deer you see and harvest from your land. I tell most landowners to not expect a major improvement the very first year but to look 5 years into the future. By this time your stands should all be fine tuned to the exact tree they need to be in and the habitat improvement projects should have had time to develop into major improvements to the property.

The latter pages of this plan will outline basic land management projects and offer advice on implementing them. Some of these may not apply to your property at this time but may help you at some point in the future. I have completed habitat improvement projects on tens of thousands of acres of land, thus the advice that I am giving you has been learned through many years of trial and error. By listening to this advice you can save yourself time and money as well as frustration.

Finally, I suggest that you keep this plan and read through it a couple of times a year. It will keep you on track and validate your efforts as you wait for them to pay off.

Please keep me advised of your success. I want to share in your success stories and hopefully use you as a reference. Thank you.

Good Hunting,
Don Higgins

Property Specifics

Initial Observations

This property sits within some great looking deer cover but currently is not a whole lot different than the properties that surround it. The weakest link in this area is clearly food and how good this property becomes will be closely tied to the quantity and quality of the food it offers the local deer herd.

I think the bedding cover on the property is already good but there are some things that could be done to make it even better and also help it stand out from the properties around it. My suggestions will be made with the idea to make the property as good as it can possibly.

This plan was designed with a 2-pronged approach to make the property the very best it can be to produce giant mature bucks. First we want to get those bucks bedding on the property. Killing big bucks consistently requires hunting them on the properties where they spend their daylight hours, where they bed!

Once we get the bucks bedding on the property, we need to feed them to keep them home as much as possible. Bucks will certainly wander onto other properties but we want to increase the odds that when a buck arises from his bed in the evening, the first place he goes is towards a food plot on this property; Thus the importance of providing a year round supply of diverse, high-quality food sources. We don't want a buck to ever **have to** leave the property for anything – food, secure bedding cover, water or does.

Habitat Improvement Recommendations

A. Sanctuary –

Typically the very first thing I look for when visiting a property is the best location for the sanctuary. On this property I have designated the entire woods as the sanctuary. It is going to be very important to eliminate human intrusion into this area. I know this sounds very extreme and radical but honestly this is probably the most important piece of this whole plan along with providing year round food. If you want big mature bucks to bed on the property you have to give them the security that they demand. If you build it, they WILL come!

I think this area could benefit from a timber stand improvement (TSI) cut. This means cutting, hinge-cutting or girdling the trees with little value. In particular, there are a lot of cedar thickets in some areas that need thinned. I would do a very aggressive cut across the entire sanctuary but suggest dividing it into smaller sections of 8-10 acres or so each. I would do cut 1 as soon as possible then every year or two do another area within the sanctuary.

B. Primary Food Plot –

I was struck by the generally small size of food plots currently on the property and the fact that there was no food to be found on the day I toured it. Clearly the amount of food supplied needs to be **greatly** increased.

Take a look at the attached aerial photo. It shows the sanctuary area located on the south side of the property. On the north side is a cedar thicket that would be an ideal place for a major food plot that would draw the deer from the sanctuary in the evenings to the heart of the property. Thus when a buck stands from his bed in the sanctuary he is much more likely to venture towards the center of the property instead of towards neighbors where he may get killed. For this plan to work there needs to be enough food in this area to feed the deer 365 days a year. This large plot will also draw in a lot of deer from other properties as well. This just increases the amount of food that needs to be provided. It will be important to monitor this plot each spring to make sure it is big enough to provide the food needed to get the deer through the winter. My preferred crop for this plot would be soybeans.

C. Secondary Food Plots -

I realize that there are currently a couple of smaller plots on the property that are being used at this time. My first choice would be that these plots be eliminated and all of the food provided at the one primary plot. I realize this might not provide enough food so I am not totally against keeping these plots.

D. Supplemental Feeding –

Another option for addressing the food on the property is supplemental feeding. I would have 2 large-capacity tube-type feeders filled with a quality feed during the entire off-season. I would locate these at the north side of the plot in the area between blinds 2 and 3. It is important that the feed offered be more than just shelled corn or other low-nutrient feed. I suggest using Real Worlds Maximizer complete feed or the following feed recipe –

400# Maximizer feed concentrate (includes all the vitamins, minerals and other nutrients deer need)

400# roasted soybeans

100# soybean oil

1100# - rolled or steam-flaked corn

E. Fruit Tree Plantings –

The final step to addressing the need for food on this property and making it stand out from other properties in the area is planting a variety of fruit and mast bearing trees – apples, pears, persimmons, chestnuts. I would plant these around the edges of the primary food plot. The center of the property should be a deer buffet with a lot of diversity in food sources.

Plant these trees in groups with each species grouped together. In other words, plant apple trees together with other apple trees, plant pears together and plant

chestnuts together. This will help with pollination but also help concentrate deer in specific areas. For example, when the pears are ripe, there will be a limited number of pear groves where deer are feeding instead of random pear trees scattered all over the property.

F. Access Path –

I think it is important to have access to the property boundaries. I have marked an access path around the property that I think would be beneficial to create. This path is to easily access stands around the edge of the sanctuary. This path should follow the property lines as closely as possible but terrain may dictate that it follows a slightly different route.

Tree-Stand Locations

I have marked just 6 locations for stands/blinds on the property. Look closely at the marked aerial map and notice how most of these are on the edge of the sanctuary and the wind blows the hunters scent out away from the sanctuary. There are likely a few other good stand locations around the edge of the sanctuary where good stands can be placed. Just keep in mind that it is very important to stay out of the sanctuary areas as much as possible.

I would use enclosed blinds at locations 1, 2, 3 & 4.

I realize that this section is very brief as many hunters seem to think that their lack of success is due to stand location and if the right person would come to their property and just show them where to hang their stands they would magically start shooting bigger bucks. This is seldom the case. First you need to get those bucks staying on your property and moving comfortably. Once that is accomplished, most hunters can pick stand sites to get those bucks killed. Again, once the habitat projects are implemented, travel routes on the property may change to some degree so remain flexible to new stand locations.

Summary

This is a very nice property that is located within a very good area. I think the suggestions I have made here can help make it stand out from other nearby properties.

It all starts with large sections of undisturbed bedding cover or sanctuary. The key to consistently killing big bucks is to hunt them on the properties where they spend their daylight hours. It is uncanny how a mature buck can find those areas where human intrusion is limited or even better, nonexistent. If you provide it, the bucks will find and utilize it. I realize it will take an extreme degree of discipline to stay out of the sanctuary area but that is one of the most important pieces to this plan.

The second most critical part of this plan will be to provide enough high-quality food on the property. This will be a challenge as the number of deer feeding here grows. The local deer should be able to find food on this property 365 days a year. Doing this will allow the property to get a little better every year as deer learn they can always find food here.

Setting YOUR Property Apart from Others

The key to making your property the very best it can be for deer hunting is to have it stand apart from other properties in the area in the eyes of the local deer herd by offering something different that cannot be found elsewhere in the area. I often tell landowners to think of their property as one small square on a giant checkerboard. What can you do to make your “square” stand out from all the other “squares” (properties) around it?

There are basically two things you can do to have a positive influence on how and how many deer utilize your property. First, you can improve the quality of the habitat on your property. It is obvious that deer, or any other wildlife, prefer to utilize habitat that best meets their needs. You can set your property apart from other properties in your area by making the habitat the best it can be and also by introducing food-sources and cover-types not commonly found in your area. A couple of examples are planting persimmon trees if your area does not have many persimmon trees or planting native grasses for bedding cover if this is not found in your area. If deer want to utilize either of these (and they will), they will have to do so on YOUR property. These examples may not apply to your specific property but there ARE things that can be done to set your property apart in terms of food sources and cover.

The second thing you can do is not as obvious but in my opinion is the most important. That is, limit human intrusion on much of your property to create a property that deer feel comfortable staying on. You don't just want deer to “use” your property; you want them to “STAY” on your property. You can have the very best habitat in the entire state but if you put too much pressure on it, the deer will simply spend their daylight hours elsewhere and primarily utilize it at night. Think of those off-limits areas you know of where hunting is not allowed and deer seem to congregate such as a park. In most cases nothing has been done in those areas to improve the habitat but yet the deer flock there because of the security it offers. It is that freedom from human intrusion that attracts and holds them there. You should try to replicate this kind of situation on your property, and then by adding the influence of the best habitat and food in the area, you will begin pulling in deer like a magnet. Keep in mind that this situation and quality habitat takes time to create and be recognized by the deer. Be patient, if you create it, they will find it.

Sanctuaries

I fully believe that every mature buck alive today has a sanctuary. If he didn't, he would be dead and would never have made it to “mature” status. He may even have more than one sanctuary but rest assured, he has a place to go when the heat is on. Some hunters mistakenly believe that extreme hunting pressure can drive a buck from his home area. Research has shown that this is not the case, especially with mature bucks. They have learned how to survive in their home range, not by running to places which they are not familiar. If you are fortunate enough to own or completely control the land you hunt on, you have an opportunity to increase your success on mature

bucks many times over by simply creating a sanctuary. The size and location of the sanctuary will depend on a number of factors but when talking about sanctuaries, I am fully convinced that bigger is better. Some “experts” promote the idea of having multiple smaller sanctuaries with the idea that bucks will travel between them as they search for does. I don’t buy into this line of thinking whatsoever except on larger properties with specific layouts. It is almost always better to have a single larger sanctuary.

A sanctuary needs 2 things. First, it must be free of **ALL** human intrusion, especially during the hunting season and preferably for the entire year. There are only 2 times when I will go into the sanctuaries on my land; (1) when I shoot a deer and it runs into the sanctuary I will go in to retrieve it and (2) I will make a single trip through my sanctuaries during the late winter/early spring to look for shed antlers and to do habitat work. I do not carry on with shed antler hunting or habitat projects in these areas for a number of days. I get in and get it done and then get out and stay out. Remember, a sanctuary is only a sanctuary as long as you allow it to be. Hunt it once and it is no longer a sanctuary. Allow dogs to travel through and it is no longer a sanctuary. Allow mushroom hunting or small game hunting and you no longer have a sanctuary. Secondly, a sanctuary needs thick cover for bucks to routinely utilize it and feel safe. Do whatever it takes to create thick cover; log it HEAVILY, kill bigger trees with no timber value to allow sunlight to reach the ground and thus promote the growth of ground cover, plant tree seedlings and bushes or tall native grasses in open areas or whatever it takes.

One more thing regarding your sanctuary, in most cases it is best to not extend the edge of your sanctuary to your property line if possible. There is no reason to have your neighbors taking advantage of your work by hunting right next to your sanctuary just on the other side of your fenceline. Set the edge of the sanctuary back 50 yards or so from the property line so that you have a thin strip of cover to hunt the edge of your sanctuary.

The most important thing that you can do on your property is create a sanctuary. You don’t want bucks to just be using your property, you want them staying there and this requires a sanctuary. If you build it, they will come!

One Plan at a Time

Recently I have seen a situation with a few landowners that I feel obligated to address in order to offer you the best advice possible. I am going to try to do so as respectfully as possible without stepping on anyone’s toes. What I am offering here is simply what I consider “good advice” to help you get the very most from your property. Please take it as it is intended and don’t get offended.

I have visited some properties where the property owner also had other consultants come and offer their advice and plans as well. I am not at all offended by this. Sometimes I have arrived after other consultants and offered an alternative plan and in some cases other consultants came after my visit on a property. I fully respect a landowner’s right to do as he wishes on his own property but I am simply trying to

caution you from making a mistake that I have seen happen more than once on multiple properties.

The mistake I am talking about is trying to take little bits and pieces of multiple plans and mold them together into something better than any of them on their own. Every time I have seen this happen, my opinion is that the result was worse than if the landowner had simply looked at all the plans offered and then chose 1 to work with.

Think of it like this; say you are going to buy a new truck and you really like Fords but your wife likes Chevys and your son is a big fan of Dodge. Do you try to come up with a unique compromise plan and use parts of each to create your own truck? How would it work (or look) if you took the bed off a Dodge, the cab off a Chevy and the engine off a Ford and tried to combine them? From what I have seen, that is what you get when you try to combine different plans for a property. Various pieces of a plan fit together with other pieces of the same plan to get you the best end result.

I use this analogy with the trucks with a bit of reservation as I do believe that some plans will work a lot better than others on a particular property. That is why I am selective about the properties that I will consult on. I have a way of doing things that has proven to be very successful on multiple properties and I believe it will work on your property or I would have never agreed to do it. Details may need to be tweaked to fit each situation but the basics of my plan will be similar on most properties I visit.

Again, I am not offended by anyone seeking advice from other consultants or even choosing someone else's plan over mine and it really doesn't matter to me that a landowner tries to take bits and pieces from multiple plans to create his own. I am just trying to honestly offer what I feel is good advice and keep you from breaking down on the whitetail highway as you drive along in a Chevordge truck!

Shooting Does

I often get asked my opinion on shootings does. It is important to keep the deer herd at levels that will prevent them from over-browsing native vegetation. On most properties this means shooting some does. On properties that I own and manage, I typically try to make sure at least 2 does are shot for every buck. I must admit however that there are locations such as my home property where currently the deer population is so low that I do not shoot any does. I share this realizing that this situation is not typical.

My best advice on this topic is to determine how many does you think should be harvested on your property and then do so in such a way that it does not have a negative impact on your buck hunting success. This means shooting them in a location or at a time of the season when impact on your buck hunting is minimal.

If you live in a state where baiting is legal, then I suggest setting feeders in locations on the property as far as possible from where you intend to do your buck hunting. Areas close to houses or a cabin are great for this. If baiting is not legal in your state then plant small food plots in these same locations for doe hunting.

The timing of the doe harvest is also a way to minimize the damage done to buck hunting opportunities. I have never shot does during the rut. I either do it very early in the season away from my prime hunting spots or preferably during the late season.

The Best Time to Kill a Buck – Mornings or Evenings

I often get asked if I prefer hunting mornings or evenings and this is a question that I have very strong opinions about. I will break down the entire season and share my opinion for each part. Keep in mind that like every other topic covered in this plan, I am talking about hunting mature bucks here.

October – In the early season I never hunt mornings, period! I strongly believe that in October by daylight most mature bucks are already back in their beds. Hunting in the mornings is a good way to burn out good stands and put unnecessary pressure on your hunting property.

November – This is the time of season that deer hunters wait all season for as the rut gets a lot of bucks on their feet during daylight hours making them vulnerable. I start hunting mornings in early November and in fact I prefer mornings over evenings during the November rut.

If I was to pick the very best week to hunt and see the most bucks it would be November 5-12 every year. To narrow it down even further, more Boone & Crockett bucks are killed November 8 than any other date. I have killed several mature bucks on November 7th and 8th. These are my 2 favorite dates for the entire season and this is when I will hunt all day if possible. Basically the bucks are fired up but the does are not yet coming into heat. Around November 9th the mature bucks start hooking up with hot does and become a lot harder to kill.

Another great time to hunt is Thanksgiving weekend. At this time the hot does are becoming harder to find and mature bucks must spend more time on their feet looking for each one. There was a period of time about 15 years ago when the biggest buck I saw from a stand each season for 5 consecutive years was seen during Thanksgiving weekend. None of those bucks was with a doe but was alone searching. Many deer hunters get burned out or quit hunting hard towards the end of November but the last few days of the month can be the very best.

Late Season – Once December rolls around I go back to hunting evenings only. Bucks will get back on a feeding pattern and will hit prime food sources. Most days it will be at the very end of good shooting light or even after dark when they reach a food source. The real key to late season success is the weather; the worse the weather, the better the hunting. I like brutal cold temps and some snow makes it even better. Under these conditions even the most nocturnal buck will be on his feet feeding before dark.

“When and Where”

Successful hunting can really be summed up by being in the right spot at the right time. Often I see deer hunters who can pick out good spots (the “where”) but hunt them at the wrong time (the “when”). Both of these factors, the “when” and the “where”, need to come together for success. In the section above I have helped narrow down the “when” in this equation as it changes throughout the season.

Trail Cameras and Rope Scrapes



I often get asked about trail cameras; which brands I prefer and how I use them. Without a doubt the best brand I have found is Reconyx. They are not cheap but there is not another brand that comes close in terms of quality, customer service and dependability.

I typically use trail cameras to inventory bucks on a property. One of the best way to do this is with "rope scrapes".

I make rope scrapes by hanging a large hemp rope from a tree so that it is about 3' off the ground. I fray the end of the rope but first put a hog-ring or zip-tie around it to keep the whole rope from unraveling. I hang these ropes in locations where I would expect to find natural scrapes and do so in the early spring so they have time to weather before hunting season.

I return in the summer with a small spray bottle of Round-Up herbicide and spray a 4' diameter circle under the rope. I then come back in early to mid October and using a garden rake, I rake away the dead vegetation under the rope and pour scent onto it. I also hang my trail camera at that time.

I prefer Smokeys Deer Scents (any of the glandular ones will work) and I only scent the rope one time. If it is in a good spot the bucks will take over and you won't need to scent it again. Within a week or two you should have photos of every buck on the property. It is important to hang the ropes early, be mindful of your scent (wear rubber boots) and don't check the camera too often. I use the same ropes year after year and after a while the bucks often open the scrapes before I get there to do it.

Pulling Bucks onto Your Property

There is a misconception among many land managers that they can improve their property to the point where they can attract mature bucks from surrounding properties to begin living on their property. From my experiences this actually rarely if ever happens. I have found that a land manager has an opportunity to grow his own bucks and allow them to mature but the ability to draw in new mature bucks is very limited.

It is rare for a mature buck to pick up and move to a new property. In fact as a buck matures his home range shrinks. Even under substantial hunting pressure a buck does not leave his home.

There is also the fallacy that when a mature buck is killed off a property another mature buck will move in and take his place. Really? Where does the new buck come from? I don't think a new buck moves in when another is killed but instead a new buck becomes the dominant one and often becomes more visible as the new top dog.

Many hunters believe that during the rut new bucks will show up and cruise their property looking for does. I also do not believe this happens all that often. It is extremely rare for me to even get a trail camera photo of a new buck during the rut although it does occasionally happen. Instead I think that bucks start searching their entire home range for does when outside of the rut they are utilizing only a portion of their range most of the time. Again, mature bucks do not throw caution to the wind and go on searches to new areas. In most cases when a hunter sees or gets photos of a "new" buck during the rut, that buck was there all along but was just not as visible or was not frequently utilizing that portion of his range.

The one time of the hunting season when I see the most "new" bucks show up on a property is during the late season when weather is bad and prime food sources are scarce. Even then the movement of new bucks onto a property is limited. My theory is that when conditions get really tough and food is scarce that a new buck moves onto a property it is a buck that has been there before. I believe many of these bucks spent their first winter there with their mothers as button buck fawns. Later they naturally disperse to new areas where they eventually settle into a new home range. When their need for food and/or protection from the elements dictates, they remember where they spent that first winter and return.

Many of these theories I have developed from years of extensive trail camera usage and photo databases. I have followed the growth and travels of numerous wild bucks and it has been a real eye opener.

So what does all of this mean to the serious land manager? Simply that a property should be managed to grow mature bucks, not to attract them in from neighboring properties. If your goal is to harvest a 150" buck but you harvest all the bucks that are a year away from reaching that mark, it will be a very difficult goal to achieve. That dream buck you have in mind is likely on your property right now but has just not had time to reach the size you seek. As a land manager you have more control over your own success than anyone else including your neighbors. Don't pick the fruit before it is ripe.

Foodplots

Most hunters do not utilize food plots to their full potential. They seem to want to use the foodplot as a bait pile to bring deer near their tree stands. While this will work to some extent and especially on lesser deer, I believe that there are better ways to use food plots on your property when hunting mature bucks. **I primarily use food plots to hold deer on my land rather than as a bait pile.** This does not mean I never hunt over food plots however.

I do very limited hunting over my foodplots (except late season) and instead hunt back closer to the bedding areas or in the transition zone between bedding areas and feeding areas. Again, this is especially important when hunting mature bucks. **There will be very few days during the hunting season when a mature buck will actually be in a foodplot during hunting hours. The odds of you being there during those rare occasions are slim.**

Let the does and young bucks have the run of the foodplots on your land rather than spooking them off by hunting right where they feed. As these deer utilize your property comfortably, they will attract and/or calm the mature bucks which you can then hunt more successfully near the edges of your sanctuary.

Now I say all of this with an exception; during the late season when brutal cold weather hits, mature bucks can be killed over food plots and I have done so many times. It is critical to have that brutal cold weather for this to work consistently however. Brutal late season cold-spells will get even the most nocturnal buck on his feet and in the food during daylight hours.

Greens & Grains

When planning a food plot program for any property it is critical that the plan include both “greens” and “grains”. During warmer periods of the season deer will focus more on greens with grains being a smaller portion of their diet. The opposite is true during colder periods when grain becomes a prime food source.

My Preferred foodplot crops by season-

Early season (October) – clover, oats, Real Worlds “Harvest Salad” or “Deadly Dozen”

Rut (November) – clover and other greens until the first hard frost then soybeans

Late season (December & January) – soybeans & Real Worlds “Plot Topper” or “Deadly Dozen” when it is cold; “green” crops such as clover, oats and “Harvest Salad” and “Deadly Dozen” when weather is warmer

Mast Crops

A good way to help set your property apart from other properties in the area is by planting trees and shrubs that produce mast, either soft mast such as apples, pears and persimmons or hard mast such as acorns and chestnuts. The key here is “diversity”. Plant as many different species and varieties within each species as possible. Look especially for species that are not common in your area.

Another factor to consider is the timing of the mast drop or “when” the mast is ripe. Many apple trees for example, ripen before hunting season is open. Having a few of these trees is fine to help get deer on your property but having later ripening varieties is even more important as you need the deer to be there during hunting season. Here are some species and varieties to consider –

Apple – Liberty, Freedom, Enterprise, Arkansas Black, Yates (*when planting apples be mindful of possible disease issues such as “cedar/apple rust, fire blight, apple scab and mildew*) the varieties I listed here are later ripening and more disease resistant varieties. Also keep in mind that it is a good idea to mix as many varieties as possible in a planting for cross-pollination and to lengthen the window of time when apples are available.

Pear – Kieffer, self-pollinating and produce fruit at a young age and drop fruit later in season than other varieties. Pears are generally more maintenance free than apples.

Persimmon – My best experience with persimmons has been with the native persimmon rather than some of the grafted oriental varieties. I have planted several of the oriental cultivars but have yet to see the first fruit from any of them. Persimmon trees are either male or female. Only the female will produce fruit but the male is needed for pollination. Plant persimmons in groves of at least 6-8 trees.

Chestnuts – The current rage amongst whitetail habitat enthusiasts is the Dunstan Chestnut. Chestnuts are claimed to be more desired by deer than any variety of acorn and I agree with this. My personal experience and opinion is that Chinese chestnuts are every bit as good as Dunstans and certainly less costly. Dunstan chestnuts have simply had a marketing campaign behind them to drive the price up. Chestnuts do not like wet areas or soils with higher pH but seem to thrive in well-drained soils with a low pH.

Sawtooth oaks – a decade ago sawtooth oaks were the big thing as it was claimed that they would put on acorns in 5-8 years and the acorns from these oaks were preferred over other species. I can say for certain that in our region of the Midwest, it would be very rare to see acorns on a sawtooth oak less than 10 years old. Because sawtooth oaks hold their leaves in winter, I personally like them as much for the cover they provide as the food.

Native oaks – all native oaks produce acorns. Some species produce a lot faster than others and some species are more palatable to deer. I often include a few native oaks on most projects that I design. My favorite native oak is the swamp white oak.

Tree plantings

Some properties can benefit from tree plantings for cover as well as food. I have planted literally millions of trees on thousands of acres on various conservation projects across the Midwest as a tree planting contractor. This experience has taught me many valuable lessons that can save you time and money. I will share many of these lessons with you here so that you can improve the habitat on your property with the least amount of frustration.

Some tree species are much better suited for wildlife plantings for a variety of reasons. In most situations it is best to diversify your tree planting with different species. This will ensure your planting will still be a success if a pest or disease wipes out one species at some point down the road.

Planting Trees for Cover

In regards to planting trees to create cover, I have used 3 species of conifers (evergreens) on wildlife plantings; white pine, Norway spruce and red cedar. Today I use red cedars almost exclusively.

Norway spruce are slow growing and very particular about the sites they will do well on. They also require extra care to survive making them impractical in most situations.

White pines can provide good cover but getting them established can be a real problem as whitetails love to eat the tops of them when they are small, thus ruining them. Bucks also like to rub them and will ruin several more even after you get a stand tall enough that they cannot eat the tops.

Red cedars on the other hand have several advantages. Even though bucks will rub them, red cedars are able to develop a new leader on young trees that have been damaged significantly by rubbing. Thus a severely rubbed red cedar is not necessarily ruined forever. Also, deer do not typically eat red cedars. Finally red cedars are very tolerant of drought and tough growing conditions. In fact they will grow in rocks and gravel. If you get young red cedars to make it through their first summer, which is easy to do, they will almost always survive on most sites. I have found that planting potted red cedars in the fall will result in nearly 100% survival and they will experience superior growth rates due to a better root system than bare-root seedlings planted in spring.

I like to mix other species with red cedars to create excellent bedding cover. Oak species which hold their leaves through the winter are good choices – sawtooth oak, swamp white oak, pin oak, and shingle oak. In my opinion, creating the perfect bedding area is best done with a mixture of red cedars and an oak species or two that holds its leaves in the winter.

Note – Higgins Outdoors works closely with a local trusted nursery that grows several thousand potted trees each year for habitat projects. They can either sell you the tree for planting yourself or they will also do the planting on your project. Contact us for the contact info for this nursery.

Trees Planting Tips

- Plant bare-root seedlings as early in the spring as possible. This gives them more time to get established before the stress of summer drought sets in
- When possible, use potted trees and shrubs instead of bare-root. They establish quicker and will set your project ahead about 5 years over bare-root
- Plant mast producing trees such as persimmons in groves near your foodplots rather than scattering them about your property. This will concentrate the feeding activity on your property in smaller areas and create more huntable travel patterns with the deer
- On smaller tree planting projects consider using plastic tree tube shelters on all of your trees and seedlings even if it means planting less trees. Using tube shelters will result in better survival and faster growth rates.
- Use herbicides to cut down on weed competition around your trees and seedlings. Grass is especially tough on young trees as it has a dense root system that competes for moisture. Plastic tree tube shelters will make it easier to keep the herbicide off of the trees
- Use trees and seedlings that are grown from a seed source suitable to your area. Many seedling nurseries sell seedlings that are grown from seed sources too far south for much of the Midwest
- Keep in mind that the small trees you are planting will someday become huge trees. Give them plenty of space
- The more sunlight and root space that your tree seedlings get, the faster they will grow. Do not plant them in shaded areas or close to bigger established trees which will out-compete them for moisture
- do **NOT** fertilize your seedlings/trees the year they are planted. Fertilizer will promote new top growth and the seedlings need to get their roots established and growing again before they put on much new top growth

Timber Logging

While many people mistakenly look at logging in a negative light, it is actually a good thing for the forests and woodlands. It is no different than harvesting a crop. A farmer would not think of letting his mature corn crop sit in the field and rot so why would you allow your valuable timber to remain past it's prime to eventually die and turn to waste? One of the best ways to create whitetail bedding cover on your land is to log it heavily. The downed tree-tops that remain are favorite places for deer to bed and

as sunlight is then allowed to reach the ground, a thick cover of weeds and saplings will take over and improve the attractiveness of your property significantly to whitetails. Make no mistake, logging makes your property better for whitetails while also putting money in your pocket that you can use for other projects.

Native Grasses

There is probably nothing that you can do to create quality bedding cover faster than to plant some acreage in tall warm season native grasses, also known as prairie grasses. Whitetails absolutely love to bed in native grass fields. Whitetail does actually prefer to fawn in these grassy fields over wooded areas. Fawn survival is also better in these areas. As an added bonus it is often possible to sign up tillable acreage for various CRP programs that will not only pay you to establish native grasses but also pay you an annual payment for enrolling in these programs.

While I have long understood that whitetails utilized native grass fields, I was not able to fully appreciate just how good they are as quality whitetail habitat until several years ago when I planted several acres on my own property. Take my word for it, these tall grass fields are not just for birds and upland game. Monster whitetail bucks will readily utilize a native grass field as a sanctuary.

Keep in mind that not all native grasses are created equal. Besides growing to different heights, some varieties of some species will not stand up well to snow and high winds. I was instrumental in developing a blend of native grasses designed for whitetail bedding cover. This mix will stand up well through most winter weather and is tall enough to easily hide bedded deer. To learn more about this special whitetail bedding blend called "Bedding in a Bag", go to www.realworldwildlifeproducts.com

Supplemental Feeding

In states where feeding deer is legal many hunters put out corn, apples and other "bait" for deer. What I am talking about here is not "baiting" but instead is feeding deer a quality feed to help keep them healthy, productive and maximize their potential. Putting out straight corn for deer can actually have adverse affects and cause health issues such as acidosis. I am not going to get into the pros and cons of baiting deer but I will encourage you to feed something besides straight corn if you do it.

If supplemental feeding were legal in my home state I would certainly be doing it. Being mindful that a whitetails nutritional requirements change throughout the year, I would adjust my feed ration accordingly. In the spring and summer I would shoot for a feed ration that is 17-18% protein and 8% fat while also being high in fiber. In the fall and winter I would shoot for a feed ration that is 15-16% protein while maintaining the 8% fat and high fiber. Your local feed mill can design a feed ration using these figures.

You can also use a high quality commercial feed such as Real Worlds Maximizer Pro-Formula Plus. The advantage to this is that this feed includes every nutrient, vitamin and mineral that deer need to stay healthy and productive.

Deer Mineral

This is another subject that I get asked about a lot. I highly recommend providing the deer on your property a high quality mineral if it is legal to do so in your state. I would recommend at least 1 mineral site for every 40-80 acres and I suggest putting the mineral within the cover and close to water or food sources in locations that deer frequent.

In the livestock industry minerals have proven to have multiple benefits such as increased growth rates, better feed conversion, higher conception rates, health benefits, etc etc etc. These same benefits apply to deer.

The real issue here is that most mineral products marketed to deer hunters are salt-based with few other nutrients. In some the salt content is over 90%. This applies to the most popular products on the market, some that hunters swear help them grow bigger racks. This is simply not true and in fact is impossible. Deer readily consume these products because of the high salt content but they do the deer very little good, no different than you and I being attracted to ice cream.

Select a high quality mineral product to use on your property. I recommend Real Worlds "Maximizer" deer mineral and challenge you to find anything on the market that compares.

Treestand Tips

- Hang your stands in the late winter/early spring months, then stay away until the day you hunt them. Hanging stands at this time allows you to get in there with a chainsaw and clear substantial shooting lanes which should remain clear for a few years with a minimal amount of additional trimming
- ALWAYS consider wind directions and entrance/exit routes when hanging stands.
- I prefer stands that are all metal and that chain to a tree rather than use straps. Leaving stands in place for long periods will rot and deteriorate straps, cloth seats and other parts made of materials less durable than steel
- Make sure your stand is well hidden within the cover. The height of a stand is not near as important as the fact that the stand is hidden within the cover.
- Always pay attention to deer that you observe while hunting and be ready to **adjust your stand locations accordingly**. Sometimes moving your stand a short distance can mean the difference between killing nice bucks and watching them. Don't get married to a particular tree.
- In most instances when hunting mature bucks you are better off placing your stands closer to the bedding areas than to foodplots or feeding areas, with the exception of some late season situations.

- The more stands you have in place the better off you will be. Wind direction will automatically eliminate 75% of your stand sites on any given hunt
- Do not over-hunt your stands. I recommend no more than 2 consecutive hunts and no more than 3 hunts in any week from a single stand. Even this will burn-out most stands in time.
- make sure your stands are comfortable so that you can endure long hours in them. The best way to not kill a good buck is to not put in the required time.
- NEVER hunt a stand when the wind is wrong!



A Word About Real World Wildlife Products

Creating quality whitetail habitat and making my own property as attractive as possible to the local whitetails has been a passion of mine for decades. A big part of this passion has involved habitat work and planting food plots. Somewhere along the way I realized that the commercially available food plot seed blends that I was planting did not attract deer with the results that I desired and expected.

Eventually I began experimenting in an effort to have the very best food plots possible on my own land. At the time I had no desire or inclination to start a new seed company; I was simply trying to make my property the best it could be. My good friend Kevin Boyer had also experienced the same thing and was also experimenting with various seeds on his hunting properties. We were both having way more success with our own blends than we had with what was on the market and thus the idea was born to begin marketing our blends. That is a very brief account of how Real World Wildlife Products was started.

I share this with you because within the pages of this plan I have mentioned Real World Wildlife Products multiple times. I do this because I want you to have the very best foodplots on your property but I also do it with great reservation. The last thing I want you to think is that I am “using” the trust you have placed in me to try to sell you seed, mineral or other products. That is not the case at all. If you are happy with another product then by all means continue to use it. I am not at all offended if you are planting another company’s seed products or if you do so in the future.

My consulting service is a totally separate business entity than my partnership in Real World Wildlife Products. You trusted me to offer you the very best advice that I can

to help you reach your whitetail hunting goals and/or improve the habitat on your property. That is what I am doing and Real World seed products simply happen to be products that I believe in. No matter what you decide to plant on your land or what brand of deer mineral you use, I want you to be successful.

With this said, please do not feel obligated to buy Real World products or that I am trying to somehow work in a sales pitch. I mention them because that is what I use and because I want your property to be the best it can be. Please do yourself a favor and visit the Real World website and if I forget to give you a copy of Real World Wildlife Products "Food-Plot Reality" DVD, please ask me for one.

Magazine Article Re-Prints

The rest of this plan is a series of 3 articles which I authored and which were published in the Quality Deer Management Association's "Quality Whitetails" magazine. I have included copies of these articles because I feel they contain some very relevant information to your project. Please take the time to read them.

Conclusion

I sincerely hope that my visit to your property and the plan that I have outlined here will take your hunting success to a new level. My goal is that each of my clients will kill the biggest buck of their life within the few years following my visit.

If you have any interest in hiring outside help to implement some of your habitat projects, I may be able to help. Higgins Outdoors does a lot of tree planting projects each year and can often help with those. We also have trusted contacts for many of the other types of work that you may need.

Please keep me posted of your success and let me know if you have any questions. I keep a copy of your plan as well as your aerial photo on file to refer back to when needed.

Thank you for trusting me to offer advice for your property and please let me know if you have any ideas that would help me improve my services to future clients. Thanks again and God Bless!



