Weyerhaeuser Outdoors

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Welcome to the New Weyerhaeuser Outdoors

Those of you that have leased Weyerhaeuser land for a few years likely recall the "Weyerhaeuser Outdoors" newsletter that was delivered to you via the National Wild Turkey Federation (NWTF) publication "Get in the Game." Those hunters in our Mississippi/Alabama region may also recall our former "Making Tracks" newsletter. The "Get in the Game" newsletter insert was our first attempt to deliver interesting stories and information about hunting, wildlife, habitat management, and the Weyerhaeuser hunting lease program to all of our hunters across the south. However, due to changes within both NWTF and Weyerhaeuser, we were no longer able to deliver our newsletter via "Get in the Game" magazine. Also, as you likely know, we have recently moved to a web-based hunting administration system. This provides us an opportunity to use electronic media to distribute information to our hunting club customers. So, here is the new "Weyerhaeuser Outdoors" which will be delivered via email to our hunting club members and also posted on our website, www.weyerhaeuserhuntinglands.com. This issue is "deer heavy", but rest assured we plan to have a wide diversity of articles on numerous topics, so stay tuned. We look forward to your input, ideas, and photos as we build this newsletter. See the green box on page 6 to see how you can contribute to our newsletter. In the meantime, enjoy! *Darren Miller, Newsletter Editor*

On-Line Deer Scoring Tool

Researchers at Mississippi State University's Deer Ecology and Management Lab have created a tool that allows hunters to estimate antler sizes from uploaded photographs. Go to www.buckscore.com to upload your deer photos and get a score from one of 4 scoring programs (Boone and Crockett™, Pope and Young™, Buckmaster™, and Longhunter™). I recently used this tool to estimate the Boone and Crockett™ score for a buck I harvested. The BuckScore™ estimate (approx. 130") was only about 2 inches different than when I scored the deer (approx. 128"). For more about the Mississippi State University deer lab, go to http://www.buckscore.com/About/DeerLabInfo. *Editor.*

Camera Surveys – A Deer Manager's Friend

Dave Edwards, Jr. – Manager /Wildlife Biologist - Westervelt Wildlife Services

The invention of infrared triggered trail cameras for hunters and advances in this technology has taken deer management to the next level. While traditional methods of estimating deer populations and their characteristics, such as deer track counts and spotlight counts, provided valuable information to deer managers for many years, they were rough estimates at best. Thanks to the arrival of trail cameras on the deer management scene, assessing population characteristics of a deer herd and making sound management decisions to achieve desired results has never been easier.

The camera survey made its way into deer management in the late 90's after much research led by Dr. Harry Jacobson, professor emeritus at Mississippi State University, and others. The initial research was conducted in Mississippi on a free ranging wild population of deer where deer were captured and marked with ear tags to establish a known population of deer (the tagged deer). Various camera survey methods were then tested to survey the deer population. As methods were refined, Dr. Jacobson was able to capture over 90% of the tagged deer on cameras and set the foundation for the camera survey method we use today.

From my experience, few deer hunters conduct full scale camera surveys. Rather, they place a single or handful of trail cameras around their property and capture random photographs of deer using the property. These cameras are generally placed on scrapes, along trails, at feeders, or along the edge of food plots. Although the information these photographs provide cannot be used to accurately estimate deer density, they can be very useful for getting a sense of the overall buck quality, age structure, and sex ratio if enough pictures are taken from various areas of the property. A true camera survey, on the other hand, is the systematic placement of cameras across the landscape of a property to photograph as many of the deer using the property as possible during a specific period of time. Deer in the resulting photographs are counted and meticulously analyzed to extract population information needed to assess status of the deer herd.

Camera surveys can provide information on number and quality of bucks using a property.

To properly manage a deer herd and reach desired goals, deer managers must make informed and sound deer management decisions that will produce desired results in the deer herd. Deer are wild animals living in a dynamic environment making it difficult to obtain exact population counts and determine other characteristics of the herd. I tend to relate managing deer to trying to put together a large jigsaw puzzle that is missing pieces. You will never know everything about the deer herd, but every piece of the puzzle you find helps clear the picture up, giving you more insight to what the whole picture looks like. In deer management,

the most valuable pieces of the puzzle to find include deer density, overall herd health, herd age structure (bucks and does), buck quality, fawn production, and adult sex ratio. Without knowing this specific information about the deer herd, managers are forced to make best-guess decisions, which often result in mediocre or delayed results or failure. Therefore, successful deer managers seek out as much information as possible regarding their deer herd.

Camera surveys have added an extremely valuable tool to the deer manager's bag. It allowed managers to accurately determine the key population parameters to make sound management decisions. They found the missing pieces of the puzzle! When properly conducted, camera surveys can capture 90+% of a deer population on camera. With this information, detailed analysis of the photographs allow mangers to determine the deer density, buck age structure, buck quality, fawn recruitment, and adult sex ratio of a given property. When combined with other information collected through harvest data, observation data, habitat assessments, and other sources, the modern deer manager doesn't have to guess as much and is certainly more successful at reaching their goals.

This buck, from Weyerhaeuser's North Louisiana Timberlands region, had his picture taken shortly before being harvested.

Don't get me wrong, deer management is still not black and white. Despite these advancements, deer management still remains an art as much as it is a science. Cameras have simply taken out a good bit of the guess work.

Properly conducted camera surveys can provide estimates of deer density, sex ratios, and other information important to deer managers.

Finally, not all of us have the desire or resources to conduct systematic surveys. In those cases, cameras can also be used to identify bucks that are using a property and help hunters pinpoint buck travel patterns. When pursuing older whitetail bucks, every bit of advantage could be the difference between success and failure. Whether a deer manager or hunter, cameras can help tip the odds in your favor.

Aging Bucks on the Hoof

Nicole Rogers – Wildlife Biologist, Arkansas Game and Fish Commission

Deer management has come a long way the past ten years. In the days of old, people proudly displayed pictures of the year and a half old four point they just harvested, and only dreamed of the day they might kill a big eight or ten. In today's time, however, more eight and ten pointers are being harvested due to new attitudes regarding buck harvest by hunters. Today, most hunters or wildlife enthusiasts can tell you that growing quality bucks depends on genetics, nutrition, and age.

Because genetics are beyond the control of 99.9% of hunters, and meaningfully increasing nutrition for a deer herd can be expensive, let's discuss the easiest method used to produce larger antlered bucks. That's right, allowing a buck to mature by not shooting him when he is young is the easiest way to grow a wall hanger. And, although it is true that if you don't shoot a buck, your neighbor might, we do know if YOU shoot him, there is no way he will ever get older.

Bucks "on the hoof" can be aged based on certain characteristics. The most important lesson is to determine the difference between an immature, mature, and over-mature buck. Why be concerned with just three categories? Because the line between an immature and mature buck in most areas falls between three and a half and four and a half years of age. Therefore, it is my suggestion to note characteristics in other age classes, but pay special attention to immature vs. mature deer.

Buck Fawn – How many people have you seen drive up to the camp with a somber look on their face because they mistook a buck fawn for a doe? It happens more often than hunters would like to admit. However, there are ways to avoid taking a potential trophy before his time. First of all, the top of the head of a buck fawn will be square instead of rounded like a doe. His ears will seem too big for his face, and his nose will be shorter than that of a mature doe. Also, a doe will usually not be alone. If you are taking does to help the deer herd, the best rule of thumb is to not shoot a single deer and, if hunting over a field or open area, allow multiple deer to enter the field so you can compare deer sizes to help distinguish adult does from button bucks.

1 ½ Year Old Buck – Basically, a year and a half old buck will look like a doe with antlers. His neck will be long and lean, and he will not have much muscle definition. He will have legs that look too long for his slim body, and he will be lanky in appearance. There will be a distinct line of definition between his neck and shoulders, and he might have slight tarsal staining during the rut.

2 ½ Year Old Buck – A two and a half year old buck will develop some muscle tone in his neck and shoulders, yet there will still be a distinct junction between the two. His legs will still seem long in proportion to his body. His waist will be thin, and he will have moderate tarsal staining.


Courtesy, Arkansas Game and Fish Commission

3 ½ Year Old Buck – A three and a half year old buck will have somewhat of a racehorse appearance due to his deep chest and lean waist. His neck will be thick and swollen, and he will have prominent tarsal staining during the rut. Although the neck is swollen, you will still be able to see a junction between the neck and shoulders. His legs will look like they fit his body size.


Courtesy, Arkansas Game and Fish Commission

4 ½ Year Old Buck – A four and a half year old buck is fully mature. His chest, shoulders, and neck will be muscled and thick. There will no longer be a distinct junction between the neck and shoulders. His legs will look too short for his body. His waist will be even with his chest, and he will have a lot of tarsal staining during the rut.


Courtesy, Arkansas Game and Fish Commission

5½ and Older Buck - On rare occasions, a person might encounter a buck five years or older. A five and a half year old buck will have the same characteristics as a four and a half year old buck. However, body and antler characteristics start to decrease as a deer ages past five and a half. His back will start to sag and he will take on a pot belly. The skin around his face and neck will become loose in appearance, and he will start to lose muscle tone.

Again, it is most important to be able to distinguish between immature, mature, and over mature. Remember that bucks reach 90% of full antler development at four and a half years old. If you practice caution before pulling the trigger, and judge a deer based on body characteristics instead of antler characteristics, you will do a better job of harvesting older, larger antlered deer. You can purchase a poster that shows different-aged bucks for aging them on the hoof or you can consult this publication. For information on how using antler restrictions can be used to manage for older-aged bucks, click here. I also recommend consulting a biologist to age all harvested deer. This will help you understand characteristics of bucks by age where you hunt.

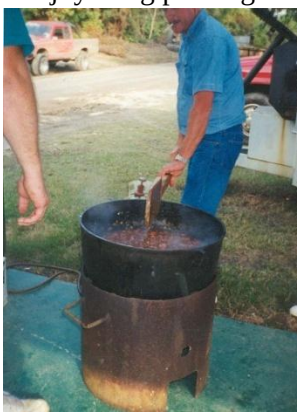
It's Not Just a Hunting Lease

Melissa Regan, LAP Program Specialist, Weyerhaeuser Company, Mississippi/Louisiana Timberlands

When is a hunting lease not just a hunting lease? Jeremy Patterson, president of Dixie Ranch Wildlife Management, LTD, located in St. Tammany Parish, Louisiana says that Dixie Ranch views their hunting club as a year round recreational opportunity. Jeremy's father, Ron Patterson, founded Dixie Ranch Wildlife Management, LTD in 1980 with a small group of others who had a vision of being able to institute a wildlife management program to improve the deer, turkey, and small game population in the area. They are very proud of the success that has been achieved by implementing this program and have been able to consistently harvest quality deer from the lease.

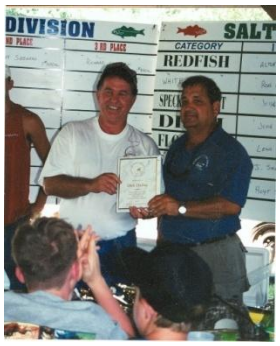
Dixie Ranch is considered to be a leader in community civic affairs. They provide sponsorship to local organizations such as youth league baseball, local high school clubs like the quarterback club, dance clubs, scouts, special needs groups and other areas as agreed to by members.

Dixie Ranch boasts of being a family oriented club. Many times throughout the year, you will find club members gathered on the lease to enjoy a big pot of gumbo, a deep fried turkey, or even boiled crabs that have been cooked by a fellow club member. Holidays provide additional opportunities to take advantage of the lease acreage. Halloween is an excellent time to get the young and old alike together for a fun filled hayride and maybe even roast some marshmallows.



Crawfish On!!

Going hand in hand with Weyerhaeuser's commitment to safety, Dixie Ranch works with the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries to offer a hunter safety program to their members.



Dixie Ranch sponsors members-only contests.

Dixie Ranch currently has 7,300+ acres under lease with Weyerhaeuser Company within the Company's Mississippi/Louisiana Timberlands Region, and has seen many changes in the community as well as in company ownership. But, Dixie Ranch has persevered through these changes and has maintained their club, experienced growth, and has a year round recreational opportunity that is enjoyed by all.

Dixie Ranch celebrates its birthday every year. Note their focus on safety.

We want to hear from you!

We are looking for hunt club members to submit questions (wildlife management, forestry, hunting, etc.), ideas for articles, comments, and photos to include in future newsletters. We would also like to feature different Weyerhaeuser hunting clubs in our newsletter. If you have something of interest for us or are interested in having your club profiled, please send an email to MSALHunting@Weyerhaeuser.com and we will work with you to get a story on your club into a future newsletter - *Editor*

HUNTING SAFETY RULES

As we gear up for another hunting season, it is important to review hunting safety rules. The #1 goal of any hunting trip should be to return home safely at the end of the trip!! I suggest reviewing safety with your hunting lease members every year. Here are some safety tips (slightly modified) from http://www.fs.fed.us/r8/boone/safety/camp/huntsafe.shtml and remember to THINK SAFE! – *Editor*

- Be wary of permanent tree stands made from wood. It is unwise to trust these types of tree stands without checking their structural integrity ahead of time. Falling limbs, wind and moisture weaken permanent tree stands over time and make them unsafe.
- Always wear a safety harness when hunting from a tree stand. Each season, hunters get injured, some seriously, when they fall asleep and take a dive off their tree stands, or slip and fall when climbing in or out of the tree.
- Wear hunter orange. This includes anyone in the woods during deer season and DO NOT take off the orange when in your stand; deer cannot see this color.
- Be sure of your target before you put your finger on the trigger. Most fatalities are the result of mistaken-for-game accidents.
- Don't trespass on your neighbor, and if you see an unfamiliar hunter in your area, escort him or her to your property boundary. Never wave to get another hunter's attention, speak loudly in a clear voice.
- Do not escalate confrontations with trespassers as this may result in a poor outcome. Instead, gather as much information as possible from the hunter (if possible) and any other observations (truck tags, person description, etc.). Then, call your state's poacher hotline or a local conservation officer.
- Never cross a fence, ride a 4-wheeler or climb a tree with a loaded rifle. Use a tow rope to pull your rifle up and down from your tree stand.
- Be careful when dragging out your deer. Each year, hunters die from heart attacks as a result of overexertion. Get help if you can't handle the chore by yourself. Go slow and take your time.
- Tell someone where you are hunting and when you expect to be home if you are hunting alone. Carrying a cell phone is a good safety precaution if you are hunting alone. Leases should also have a hunter "sign in" sheet to make everyone aware of where members are hunting.
- Never carry a loaded rifle in your truck or car, and be sure to unload your rifle when you get back to camp or when you stop hunting for the day. Treat EVERY gun as if it is loaded!

Intensive Forest Management and Wildlife

Dr. Jessica Homyack, Certified Wildlife Biologist®, Weyerhaeuser NR Company, New Bern, NC

When you hear people talk about intensive forest management, they are describing using several different techniques on the same piece of land to help grow bigger and better trees in a shorter time period. In many pine plantations in the south, a tractor is used to construct raised beds on which to plant the pines, and then trees are given a growing advantage by reducing competing vegetation with one or more herbicides. Growth maybe further advanced with fertilization. Typically, these types of "site preparation" activities are prescribed on a stand by stand basis before or soon after trees are planted so that one forest stand may receive a different variety of treatments than its neighbor. But what are the effects of these different site preparation treatments on wildlife populations and habitat?

Ensuring that forest practices are compatible with wildlife and increasing knowledge about how animals use habitat is an important part of Weyerhaeuser's Southern Wildlife Research Program. Thus, Weyerhaeuser scientists, in collaboration with other forest companies and researchers from the University of Georgia and Mississippi State University, conducted an 8-year study to help understand how the variation in site preparation affects wildlife. At each of 6 sites in North Carolina and 4 sites in Mississippi, five different treatments representing a range of intensive forest management were applied to 20 acre plots. Treatments ranged from using only a tractor to produce beds for planting pines, to a combination of bedding, fertilization, broadcast herbicide application, and two years of herbaceous weed control. Researchers from the University of Georgia and Mississippi State University trapped small mammals, conducted breeding bird surveys, and measured numerous aspects about the diversity and structure of overstory and understory vegetation. This research was unique because a variety of wildlife species were studied to provide a broad overview of how intensive forest management influenced many different forest-dwelling wildlife.

After several years of studying the treatments in both Mississippi and North Carolina, some important patterns emerged. Although vegetation structure and the species present differed among the intensive management treatments early on, by years 5-6 researchers generally could find no differences among them. Thus, any effects of the intensity of site preparation on vegetation disappeared within a few years, but treatments with the greatest number of plant species tended to be those with less intense site preparation (for example, treatments with no herbaceous weed control). Vegetation communities could have supported different numbers of white-tailed deer soon after treatments were applied, with medium-intensity treatments having the greatest carrying capacity.

Carrying capacity of deer was greatest at mid-level treatments, because treatments promoted growth of high quality browse.

This trend occurred because medium-intensity treatments supported high-quality browse species, including legumes and forbs. Again, by the early stages of crown closure around 5-6 years post-treatment, these trends disappeared and all treatments had similar carrying capacity for white-tailed deer.

The early successional habitat of newly planted pine plantations supported a great number of birds and small mammals, including several species of conservation concern, but these declined through time due to closure of the canopy rather than from the intensive forest management treatments. So, one point we learned from this work was that herbicide use affects wildlife habitat and plant diversity, but that effects generally are short-lived. Further, numerous types of treatments to establish pine plantations can provide habitat for wildlife species dependent on early successional vegetative communities.

The photos above show the least intensive (top; mechanical site preparation only) and most intensive treatment (bottom; mechanical + chemical site preparation and 2 years of weed control) 2 years after stand establishment (2003). The photos to the left show the same treatments (least intensive, top left; most intensive, bottom left) 2 years later (2005) demonstrating recovery of these stands from treatments. These photos are from the Mississippi study site. *Photos courtesy of Mississippi State University*