

Habitat Management for Deer



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When managing habitat for deer there are 3 primary focuses:



Three Focuses:

1. Food (attraction/nutrition)
2. Cover
3. Other (travel corridors, visual screens, etc.)

The first one we covered is food. I talked about providing food via food plots, but there are several habitat management practices that can increase the quantity and quality of native vegetation.

Cover: This is probably the most looked-over management practice, but possibly the most important when it comes to “holding” deer. Deer, like all wildlife species, make a living by eating and hiding. Having suitable cover is critical.

Other (travel corridors, visual screens, etc.)

These are the three primary focuses of providing good deer habitat, but the overall goal is to provide these in an arrangement that provides as much diversity as possible.

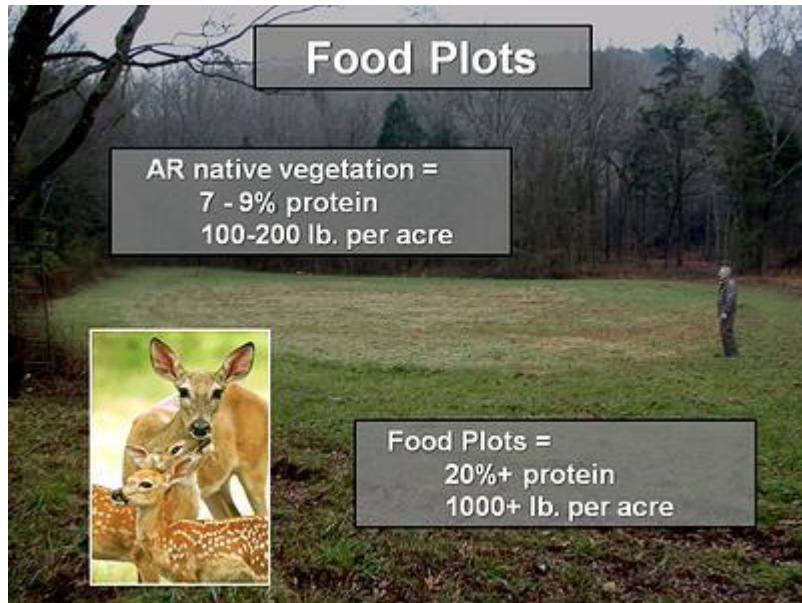
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When it comes to habitat, deer are not that picky. What I mean is that deer do not require specialized habitat, like quail for instance. There are however several management practices that can make a difference in how deer use a property, whether it be increasing the amount of cover, providing natural browse and forage, or providing a space with no competition for resources.

Anything that puts groceries on the ground is going to benefit deer.

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Food Plots were covered in the previous section. We'll not go into it here.

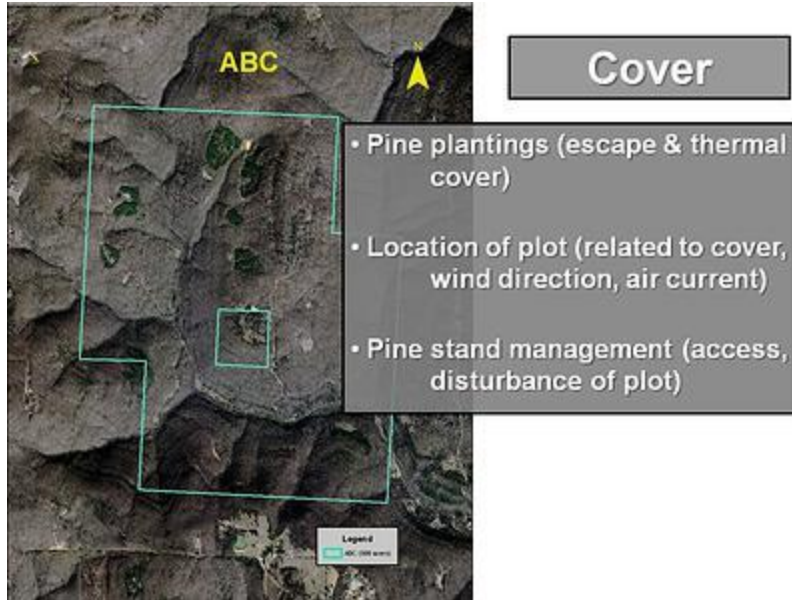
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But in order to get the most “bang for your buck” (pun intended) it is important that you really consider these four things when implementing a food plot or food plot program.

There’s that “cover” word again.

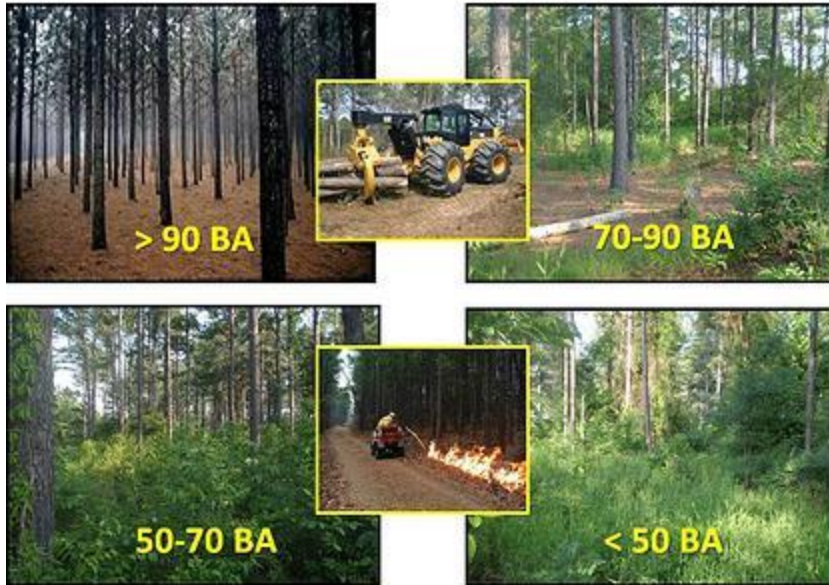
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Now cover doesn't have to be pine plantings. We used this example because there are some other benefits to using pine, but it was also easier to show you on an aerial map.

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Timber Density



The most effective way of providing cover is simply through responsible timber management practices. Here is a simple illustration of how altering timber density (or basal area) can increase cover. Basal area is simply the measure of timber density. Higher basal area numbers reflect denser forests. Decreasing timber density, decreases crown or canopy cover, which in turn increases the amount of sunlight that reaches the forest floor. Decreasing density can also improve the form and productivity of the remaining timber (example oak canopy form and acorn production). And, if you really want to get the most out of a timber harvest it is also important to incorporate a prescribed burn. This will help put that sunlight directly on the soil, which will help numerous forest plants germinate. Remember that a deer's dinner plate is from about 6' a below. If they can't reach it, then they can't eat it.

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Define hard vs. soft edges

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Most people don't think about grass when they think of deer habitat. They usually think about trees. But early successional habitat, or that grassy/old field type of condition can be very effective when managing for deer. Take a look at this fawn. Why does a fawn have spots? It's camouflage. A mimicking of light and shade patterns and other surrounding features (such as the seed heads on this grass). Not only does early successional habitat provide for excellent fawning habitat, it also provides for bedding areas, escape cover, for a buffet of food sources (sunflowers, clovers, vetches, peas, etc.). Besides deer, there are a whole host of benefits to species like turkey, quail, rabbits, songbirds.....

So you should really think about incorporating native grasses and forbs in any type of management plan. This is great way to provide additional diversity on a property.

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Livestock Exclusion Fencing

- Timber damage
- Forage competition
- Reduced wildlife cover
- Soil compaction
- Soil erosion
- Wildlife displacement



Here is something that many folks don't consider, but when it comes to deer especially, this one thing can make a huge impact.

Excluding livestock from timbered areas or area simply set aside for wildlife:

Livestock (which includes cattle, horses, goats, sheep, etc.) can have numerous detrimental impacts on your ability to attract and manage for deer.

Timber damage- many livestock species will eat the bark on trees or eat newly sprouted trees (your future acorn and soft mast producers)

Forage competition and Reduced wildlife cover- by chance you do have grasses and forbs in your timber- livestock will graze these, leaving less forage and cover for wildlife

Soil compaction- compacted soil reduces many plant species' ability to germinate- also reducing forage and cover

Soil erosion- many livestock species travel well-travelled paths. These paths over time cause topsoil erosion problems, thus deteriorating the native habitat. In certain parts of the state, topsoil is a valuable commodity because there is little there it begin with.

Wildlife displacement- Deer are very particular with the company that they keep. Very seldom, if ever, will deer mingle in close proximity to livestock. Many times the presence of livestock will displace deer to other areas.

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Travel corridors.



Like I mentioned before, deer are skiddish and cover it important. When it comes to travel, many times deer will pick an area that provides thick cover over a wide-open area. These travel corridors not only decrease the stresses of such travel, but may also increase the ability of a hunter to be successful. By well-defining these areas of travel (like between bedding and feeding areas for instance), you can influence deer movements and possibly funnel deer to travel a particular path, thus increasing your chances for a successful harvest.

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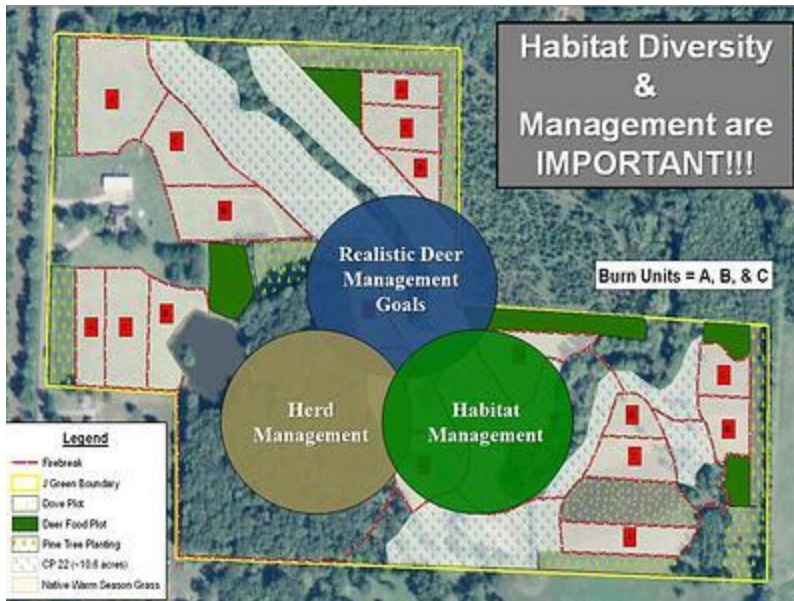


Here is an example of a landowner using native warm season grasses and plum thicket to create a travel corridor across a cattle pasture that connects two timbered areas. This travel corridor also incorporates exclusion fencing so that several other habitat benefits are maximized (such as nesting and brood rearing areas for turkeys and quail).

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Here is an example of a management plan that incorporates several of the management practices that we covered in order to improve this property for deer and other wildlife.

Here is the landowner's property boundary.



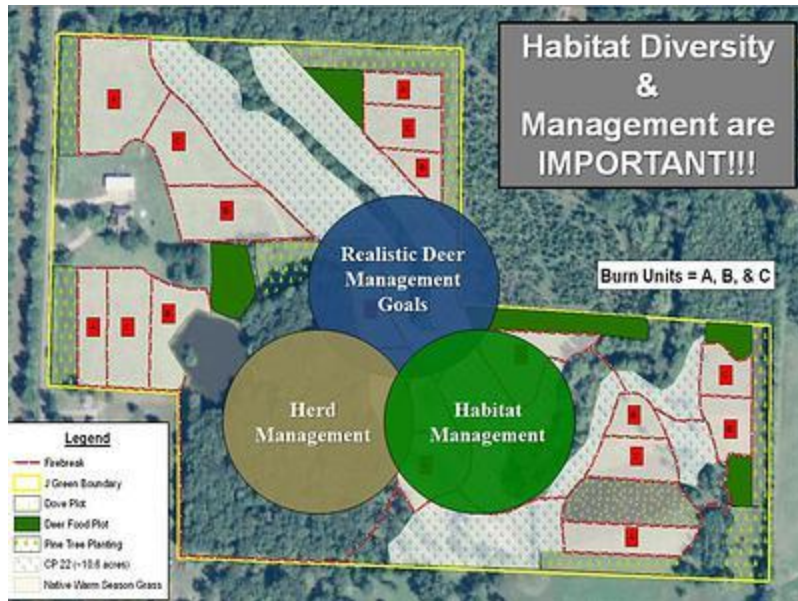
Pine tree plantings- provide for

- 1) additional cover
- 2) travel corridors and
- 3) visual screens from the neighbor to the south and from poachers from the road to the west

CP22 hardwoods- provide for

- 1) additional cover
- 2) travel corridors causing deer to utilize to utilize the interior of property more and
- 3) additional \$ from rental payments

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Food plots- situated near cover and travel corridors
NWSG fields- landowner sprayed out fescue and Bermuda grass and replanted with native grass/forb mix- will provide for 1) additional cover 2) fawning habitat

Firebreaks- will help landowner manage the nwsgr fields through controlled burning and can double as ATV trails/access

Burn Units- allow landowner to manage nwsgr fields on a 3-yr rotation (keep the integrity of the habitat) and further increase diversity

Habitat diversity and the management of those habitat types are an important part of the overall deer management picture.

Deer trifecta image: Dedicated deer managers realize the overall deer management picture, which includes habitat management, herd management, and having realistic deer management goals.

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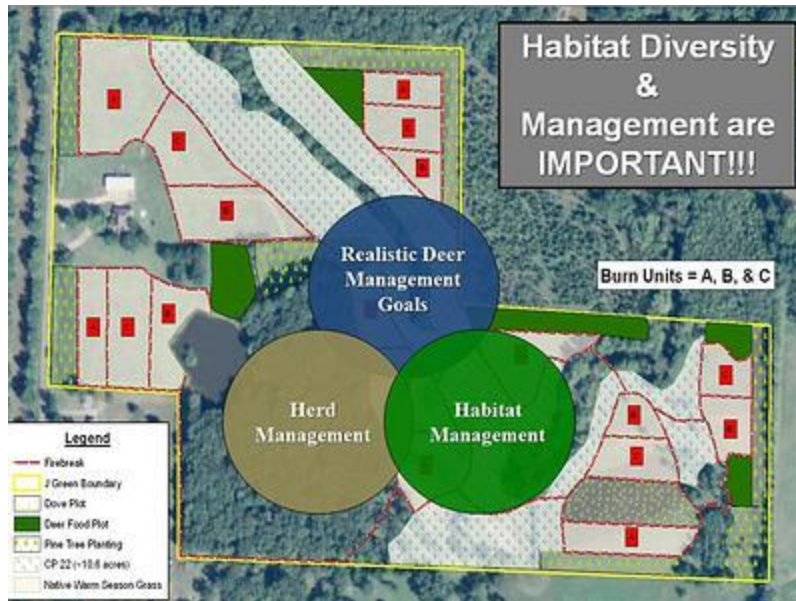
I. Habitat management: (already covered)

II. Herd management:

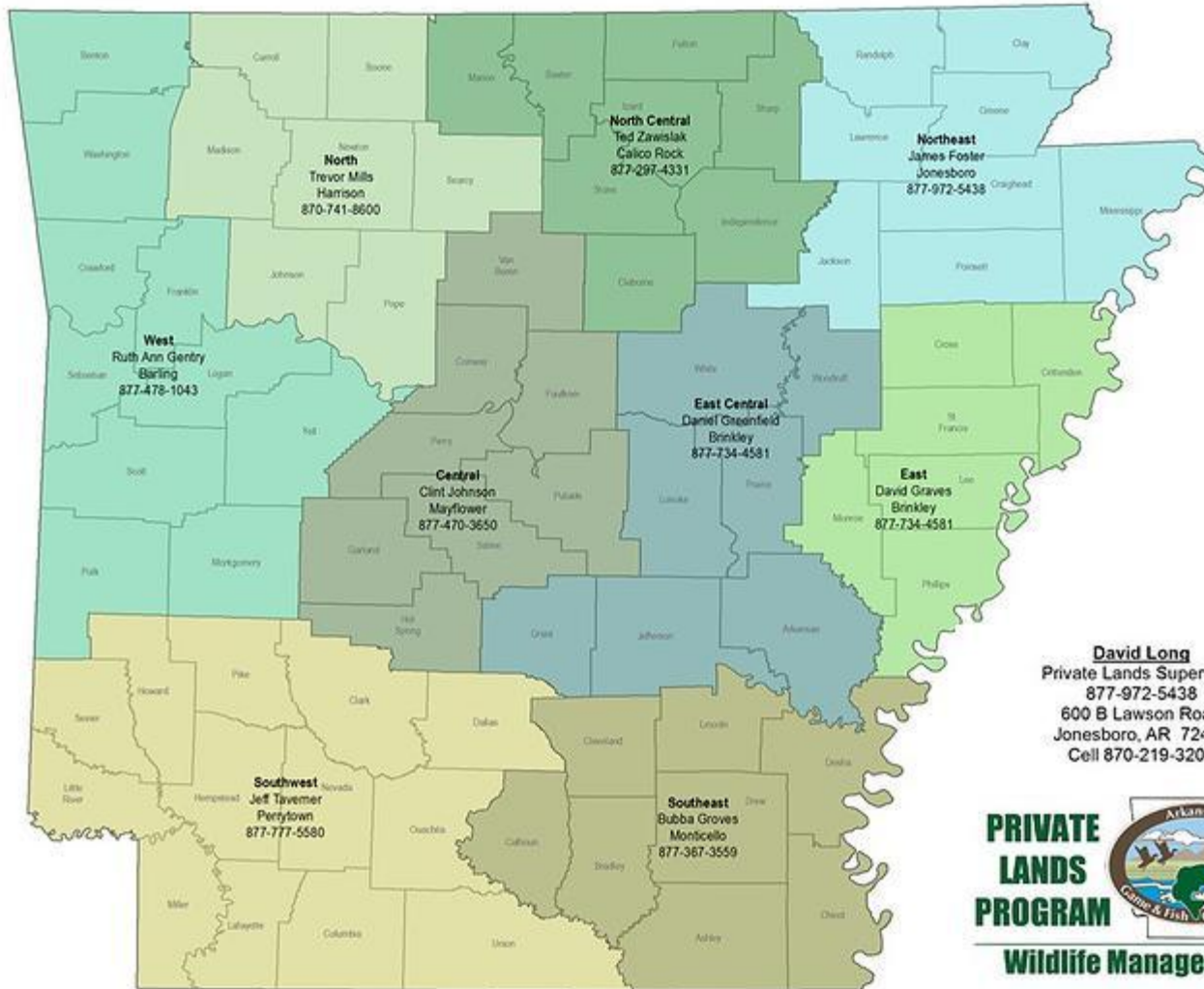
- 1) harvesting the necessary number of deer in order to balance deer population with the available habitat,
- 2) harvesting the necessary number of does in order to balance does socially within age-classes and balance buck:doe ratios ,
- 3) passing up young bucks to allow them to reach older age classes,
- 4) collecting information that will help them make future deer harvest/management decisions

III. Realistic deer management goals:

- 1) land control issues (this is a 60 acre example)- larger management co-ops can better achieve deer management. goals.
- 2) What is the expectations of implementing trophy deer management on 60 acres and successfully harvesting a trophy buck every year if your neighbor is harvesting $\frac{1}{2}$ dozen 1.5 year old bucks each year?



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If you would like to have help developing your habitat for deer or other wildlife or would like deer harvest recommendations, I would urge you to contact an AGFC Private Lands Biologist in your region. This is a free service and they can help you design your property like the example show in the last slide. They can also give you information or get you steered in the right direction on a wide variety of cost-share programs like that CP22 that I mentioned in the last slide.