

Are you shooting too many Deer?

I know that this sounds like a ridiculous question to many of you. After all we just go out hunting and if we see a deer we shoot it, right? I know that there are situations where this is exactly the case. If you can only make it out hunting a couple of days and you want to shoot a deer (any deer) then you will probably pull the trigger on the first deer that you see. You may hunt an entire season and only see one or two deer so when you see one you pull the trigger. If you hunt by yourself then it's solely your own decision to make. If you hunt with a group then the group may have a say in whether there are any harvesting guidelines or not. The most difficult thing to decide is what restrictions or limits if any should you put on the hunters in the group. I know that there are hunting groups that may have one hunter for every 300 acres and then there are groups that may have one hunter for every 40 acres and all different variations in between. Unfortunately many hunt clubs have to have a certain number of members in order to be able to afford the lease on the property. I certainly understand this but I want to try to show you how easy it is to shoot too many deer. And when this happens things just seem to go from bad to worse. Let me start out by showing you a harvest estimate for a tract of land. In this example I am assuming that there is a Doe to Buck ratio of 2 to 1 and a recruitment rate of .750. I explain what these are in my article "*Deer Management needs to be Site Specific*". Let's assume that the property has a carrying capacity of 35 deer and that there is approximately 27 deer on the property at the beginning of hunting season.

Deer Population & Harvest Estimate (Starting with late summer counts)

Number of Individual Bucks Counted	6			
Doe to Buck Ratio (x.xx : 1)	2.00	to 1		
Fawn Recruitment Rate	0.750			
Estimated Total Deer Population	27	Bucks	Does	Fawns
		6	12	9
Mortality Rate for Does i.e. 10% = .10	0.10			
Mortality Rate for Bucks i.e. 15% = .15	0.15			
Desired # of individual Bucks next Summer	6			
Desired Ratio next Summer (x.xx : 1)	2.00	to 1	Bucks Wanted	Does Wanted
			Fawns Wanted	
Total Deer Population Desired next Summer	27	6	12	9

	Does	Bucks	Total
Beginning Population (Including Fawns)	17	10	27
Estimated Mortality	2	2	4
Harvest Estimate	3	2	5
Ending Population	12	6	18
Fawns added next year	5	4	9
Next Summer Population	17	10	27

I explain the worksheet above in my video "Why Deer Management needs to be Site Specific". In the example above I am assuming that we want to end up with approximately the same deer population and ratio next summer. The above example shows that you should harvest approximately 3 Does and 2 Bucks. Let's even assume that you have no mortality in the deer population (which is unlikely) which means that you could then harvest approximately 5 Does and 4 Bucks. Well the point I'm getting at is that if you have between six and twelve members what do you do? You have more members than there are deer that should be shot. If you realized that this was the situation that existed then you might decide to put restrictions on the harvesting of deer. Unfortunately some hunters aren't going to be in the club and then be told that they aren't allowed to shoot any deer they want. So if you have no harvest restrictions, what happens is what's been happening for years and many of us can relate to this. It's like a first come first serve situation where whoever is fortunate to get a deer first is the lucky one. I remember the days when we were in a situation like this and it was simply accepted as the way it was. (It was Deer Hunting!) If you see a deer you shoot it. You may at least protect fawns if nothing else. If your group of hunters is shooting approximately the same number of deer every year then you are probably maintaining a certain deer population. Of course you may be shooting some of your neighbor's deer as well that they aren't shooting. Even with extreme hunting pressure (legal hunting that is) you won't be able to shoot all of the deer on your property. Once they feel the pressure they are second to none in survival instincts. They will probably become nocturnal and if they move during daylight they will be on full alert or they will just move off of your property. I have a separate article titled "What is Hunting Pressure?" so I don't want to get into all of that detail here. I'm just trying to make the point that there is a limit on how many deer you should be shooting and if you exceed that limit then you will definitely have fewer deer sightings. So you should at least track your harvests and sightings/camera counts so you can see if you are averaging about the same harvests and counts each season. As I have said several times it is difficult if not impossible to estimate the deer population on an unfenced property but you should do your best in monitoring your population. Some people are happy with status quo while others would like to improve things if possible. If it looks like you average shooting 10 deer total every year and you have 15 members in your club then all of the members should realize that this situation exists. If they all accept it then that's fine otherwise you should either attempt to increase your deer population (but not above the carrying capacity) or reduce the number of members. Many years ago we had no problem accepting the fact that we may only harvest a Buck every three or four years. This was because we would only see a Buck every three or four years and it was usually a yearling. Today we see several Bucks during one season and don't shoot many of them because we always ask ourselves if the Buck we are seeing looks young and/or looks like he has potential. This makes it easier for us to let that Buck walk because we know that he could be something special next season.

Now what do the guys do that have smaller acreage (40 acres to 100 acres etc...). Should you care about how many deer you should be shooting or just not worry about it since you have smaller acreage. Without question your hands are tied because you may not have any resident deer (deer that spend most of their time on your property). You have to make your own decision based on your own situation. If we were your neighbor I can tell you that we as a group with adjoining acreage would love to hear from you about deer management and would gladly invite you to sit down with us so we can review our management goals and practices and listen to what your goals and practices may be. Possibly by combining our acreages together we may be able to come up with an estimate of how many deer should be harvested. Maybe you can get a few neighbors together totaling a thousand plus acres. Things can certainly work out better if you and your neighbors are more like teammates instead of competitors.

I don't want to give the impression that only hunters that are not practicing any deer management may be shooting too many deer. The reality is even those of us who are managing our deer populations can possibly

shoot too many deer as well. After all how do you know how many deer you should be shooting? If you haven't read it yet make sure you read the article "Deer Management Phase II" where I cover this exact scenario. There is no way to know exactly how many deer you have and how many deer you should shoot. **We just need to come up with the best estimate that we can and then track our harvests and counts to make sure that everything is looking ok.** This is exactly what we have been doing since 1996 on our current property by using our management software.