Guidelines for Landowners Considering Hunting or Leasing for Deer Control

Hunting is the most cost-effective means for deer control. The DNR deer season framework allows a landowner (or other property manager) to offer seasons designed to control doe numbers by emphasizing doe harvest during all deer seasons on land where a problem exists.

The following provisions are recommended for inclusion in all leases for deer management:

1) If you have too many deer, require an "earn-a-buck" provision on your property.

   Or, at the very least, demand your hunters take as many adult does as antlered animals by the time all deer seasons have ended. This emphasis on doe harvest is necessary to curb herd growth. Current state law allows you to emphasize doe harvest on your own property if you believe it to be necessary.

2) If you have "way too many deer" then more adult does than antlered bucks (perhaps 2x, or more) need to be taken.

   Where there are way too many deer, the first deer killed by all hunters should be a doe. By seasons' end, there should be some multiple (2, 3, or more) of antlered kill, in dead does. By taking more does than bucks, herd growth is curbed, and decline will follow.

3) A simple calculation of "acres lost" X "average 'historic' field yield" X "price per bushel" can be utilized to determine crop damage loss from outfitters/leasers who fail to meet doe harvest objectives.

   Rarely are there negative consequences to outfitters/leasers for improper herd management on the acreage which they control. If outfitters, leasers and/or their deer "managers" are held accountable, and damage loss considered as a cost of doing business, more responsible management should follow.

4) Consider a clause indicating that a failure on the part of your outfitter/leaser to take sufficient numbers of does will result in a "breach of contract" – perhaps, even, an immediate cancellation of the lease.

   Outfitters and hunters wish to lease for multiple years -- no problem. However, there should be an annual meeting (or report) whereby harvest can be reviewed by the landowner to ensure that adequate doe harvest is occurring. Outfitters/leasers failing to meet the landowner’s doe management objectives may have their lease cancelled.

5) Consider damage to neighboring property.

   Being a good neighbor, you should be aware of the potential for excessive crop damage outside your property boundaries. If a neighbor should call attention to loss, an effort should be made to increase your doe harvest effort during all deer seasons.

   Be sure that your property boundaries are clearly marked, or understood, to avoid trespassing onto neighboring landowners.

6) Doe management objectives may need to change over time, and should be reviewed annually by landowner, leaser, and/or outfitter.

   The ability to modify all deer harvest objectives recorded in a hunting lease arrangement is important. As you become aware of neighboring property crop damage/loss, an effort should be made to increase doe harvest as described in numbers 1 and/or 2, above.

   Or, in those cases where successful herd reduction over time has been achieved, you may wish to de-emphasize doe take.

   Resident archery deer hunters have unlimited access to over-the-counter combination permits (one either-sex and one antlerless only); and/or single “antlerless only” permits for both resident and non-resident archers. The archery deer season lasts for more than 100 days in all 102 Illinois counties. Effective use of this season with its unlimited permit availability can lead to herd control in areas where doe harvest emphasis is exercised.

   Firearm deer permits are issued by lottery to residents and non-residents. There are separate quotas of either-sex and antlerless firearm and muzzleloader only permits for each county open to firearm deer hunting (99 of 102 Illinois counties). Annually, there have been permits remaining after the lottery process was completed. The Deer Task Force voted to pursue over-the-counter issuance of any “left-over” firearm deer permits up to the county quotas for antlerless deer. There is no limit to the number of firearm permits a person may purchase, beginning with the random daily draw period in September.

   The Illinois DNR has liberalized permit availability in recent years, especially for the taking of antlerless deer. It is up to individual landowners/leasers/outfitters to allow access to hunters willing to shoot does. The IDNR has provided a viable framework within which landowners and managers have the flexibility to achieve their deer population goals, but they must be willing to take advantage of it.

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