

## Deer Hunters Managing Crop Damage for the Farmer

Is recreational deer hunting able to manage the deer herd for Maryland Farmers? Are crop damage sharpshooters a management tool or a necessity? As we look at where deer management came from and where its going keep in mind “how the deer is managed in your area will affect deer on the property next-door and vice-verse”, deer damage can be on the farm, in the back yard or at the public park down the road.

In 1945 Department of Natural Resources (DNR) initiated a restocking program for white tail deer in Maryland. Most deer restocked came from Aberdeen Proving Ground, an Army installation in Harford County. Whether remnant populations existed elsewhere within the state is unknown. The first recorded stocking in the state was done by concerned sportsmen in the Woodmont Rod and Gun Club, a 5,000-acre private fenced enclosure. These 13 deer came from Michigan in 1914. When the herd within the enclosure expanded to the limits of the vegetation, the deer were released into Washington County. The original source of the deer on Aberdeen Proving Ground was a game farm near Harrisburg Pennsylvania with the date not known. Recent population estimates of white-tail deer in Maryland are approximately 225,000.

Management goals have changed from restocking to stabilizing and a management approach for the deer herd. Maryland’s first 10 Year White-tail Deer Management Plan was created in 1998 and Maryland is now into the second 10 Year Plan. Suburban Deer Management is the most difficult and you would think tracks of farm lands would be much easier to manage, however with the increasing urban sprawl next to farm lands and farms becoming developed, society’s respect for deer has declined creating even more challenges. Certain properties such as County or State properties or Parks, drainage right-of-ways and private property owners do not allow any type of hunting. While some of these properties have safety issues and need the use of sharp shooters, many could be hunted but the owners will not allow it. These owners are in need of management education and a plan to help with the problem that they may be creating. Farming beside or within these non-hunting properties may be near impossible. Some home owners, many of the same people that five years ago or more was against hunting as a management strategy are now rethinking what is effective or not.

If farmers have crop damage why do they not let more hunters on their properties? I get the opportunity to talk with property owners and hunters on properties that I visit to evaluate on deer issues, or at seminars and/or display booths at events. The biggest complaint from the farmers they have had a problem in the past. Once again many would say hunters are getting all lumped together. I would say in most cases this is true. However those hunters have created wounds that are hard to heal over. Examples would be driving pick-up trucks and/or ATVs through the fields, gates left open or closing gates that were meant to be left open. These are easy to avoid, don’t drive through the fields and ask landowners where to park and for permission to recover harvested deer and how to get around the fields.



The biggest and most often issue is “TRASH”, beer cans (creates an image of unsafe hunter) soda and water containers and sandwich bags. These metal and plastic items do not break down easily and will last for years. This IS NOT most hunters however we can all be stereotyped into this scenario.



Farmers and property owner are looking at why with years of hunting our deer problem is getting worst instead of improving? Properties next to farm lands often create a place for deer where hunting is not available. Some hunters may not be harvesting does to control population overloads.

Some hunters that see many does and then harvests a yearling buck or any buck without harvesting additional does. Case in point, on a farm property in Frederick County where MSC has been doing crop damage the farmer while talking with the locals that hunt his property was told they

harvested nine deer (Gun Season) off the property. These hunters bring all the deer to one spot to field dress. This area had seven deer testicles out of nine field dressing piles. The hunters had been asked to harvest all the does (female deer) they were able. This does not help the farmer with the deer problem. Next year's hunters will be required to harvest a doe before a buck or find another place to hunt.

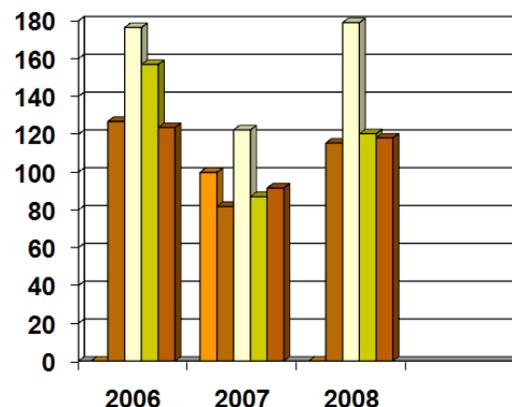
QDM (Quality Deer Management) philosophy may not be for everyone. Many hunters and landowners are rethinking what and how they can do to make a positive contribution to deer management while improving the quality of deer hunting and insuring the future of deer hunting. Most of the time we only hear of the negatives related to hunting. Let's look at some of the positives. The changes in antlerless bag limits have made huge steps toward improving deer damage. Liberal antlerless (female deer) bag limits have made it possible for hunters and property owners (farmers) to manage the deer on their properties when used. This is why antlerless (doe) bag limits are the way they are. Yes, there are still many areas that need major improvements in managing deer. Hunters are and have made great



strides in the right direction. Hunters harvested over 100,000 deer state wide last season. Compared to crop damage permit harvest total at 6800, antlered harvest in many counties stayed close to past years, antlerless harvest did increase. (We still need some improvements to the yearling buck harvest.) National Ag Stat Service conducted a crop loss study due to deer in 1998 and their estimate then was 38 million dollars. In 2007 the same group conducted the study with their estimate of 8 million dollars in Maryland.

The first QDM co-op was formed in Kent County over 10 year ago. Since then increasing numbers of hunters, landowners, farmers and wildlife managers are embracing the quality deer management philosophy. With good record keeping and the forming of Chester River Branch QDMA and the Chester River Co-op has provided crop yields charts from properties that have been practicing QDM and others that don't. This dollar and sense look show that Hunters are and can make a difference.

CORN AVERAGE IN BUSHEL PER ACRE



Population control is a major part of the QDM approach and QDMA's primary focus has always been on education, research and on-the-ground deer management. This QDM management approach will produce healthy deer herds with a balanced adult sex ratio's and increased numbers of older bucks. Typically this involves protection of young bucks with an active harvest of female deer to maintain herds within existing habitat conditions.

**Take Home Message:**

Recreational Hunting should be and can be the first line of deer management. If hunters can't or will not participate in deer management, then Crop Damage permits may be needed then maintained by hunters. The use of sharp shooting should be the last resort. A management plan with QDM guidelines is a good way to help the farmer and the hunter at the same time, and proven to be beneficial to all.

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