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Controlling White-tailed Deer Herds with DMAP Hunting

They are a problem in almost every state in the northeastern United States—white-tailed deer are having a significant impact on our regions forests. Here in New York State, the deer population is not evenly distributed. For this reason, different management strategies are needed depending on the area of the state in question. In some regions, the population is thought to be decreasing while other regions recognize an increasing population. Where deer populations are considered too high, private forest landowners like you will find yourself in quite a struggle if you hope to regenerate a forest or even grow crops on part of your land. Farmers know this all too well. If you are a forest landowner then perhaps you are aware of the difficulties associated with managing lands impacted by deer. Hunting remains a popular and time-honored tradition in America, and is also a valuable tool for managing deer herds.

The Bureau of Wildlife in the New York Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) currently manages nine specified regions divided over the entire state. In addition, they also manage ninety-six Wildlife Management Units (WMUs) on a smaller scale to allow more detailed monitoring and management of wildlife populations. Each year the DEC estimates deer population densities and works with citizen-based groups to guide deer hunting pressure in each WMU.

The DEC created a deer management program for private landowners to assist in meeting landowner objectives. The Deer Management Assistance Program (DMAP) is a tool that wildlife biologists use to manage white-tailed deer in New York. This program enables biologists to help

landowners and resource managers implement site-specific deer management on lands that meet certain requirements. Lands that meet these requirements and which suffer damage from deer, you will be given special permits. These permits will allow hunters on your property to harvest additional deer beyond the limits imposed under normal state regulations. A DMAP permit may only be used by regularly licensed hunters, and is only valid during the regular hunting seasons. Only deer without antlers or having antlers measuring less than three inches in length may be harvested with a DMAP permit.

If you are a landowner in the DMAP program, then you are responsible for distributing antlerless deer tags to hunters on your property. You must also follow the conditions associated with the permit as relate to reporting and monitoring.

In order to meet DMAP eligibility requirements, your land must meet one of the following criteria: (1) be land where agricultural damage has been documented or can be documented by the DEC; (2) be land where deer damage to significant natural communities has been documented or can be documented by the DEC; (3) be land contained in one or more parcels totaling a threshold number of acres and sharing a contiguous boundary where forest regeneration is negatively impacted by deer—this must be identified in an existing forest and/or land management plan for the land; or (4) be land contained in one or more large parcels and sharing a contiguous boundary that is being managed for improved deer herd under a deer management plan. If you and your neighboring landowners are able and willing, you can combine efforts and cooperate to meet the above acreage requirements to be eligible for DMAP.

If you are not a hunter yourself, consider inviting responsible friends to your property to hunt. Perhaps you are wary of allowing others to hunt on your private property, and this is a perfectly valid concern. In general, private landowners today provide much less access to hunters than they once did. But if you can initially establish a trusting relationship with hunters on your property, you can minimize many potential issues. For example, you could require them to sign in and out each day, and to notify you of any wildlife harvests they make during their hunt. Most hunters in New York State and elsewhere are responsible individuals who gladly oblige your requests if you allow them the privilege of hunting on your land.

Your successful involvement in DMAP can impact local deer populations. This program allows the DEC to control targeted populations of white-tailed deer, and it impact on agricultural and forest

damage. Relationships between landowners and sportsmen may improve. Landowners and hunters will collectively help to manage a very important wildlife species.

If you would like to apply to have your land included in DMAP, call your DEC regional office or download an application on their website. You may be required to submit a deer management plan about your property which describes the background and scope of the deer problem. You should also be very clear about your management goals. Applications for permits valid during the fall big game hunting seasons must be postmarked by September 1. If you think deer are a problem for your regenerating hardwoods stand, consider joining this landowner-oriented DEC program. Happy hunting!

For additional information on forestland activities that will benefit your objectives, visit Cornell's forestry website at www.ForestConnect.info, contact your local office of Cornell University Cooperative Extension, or join the New York Forest Owners Association through their website at www.nyfoa.org.

This article was written by Meredith Odat, Forest Resources Extension Assistant; Cornell University Cooperative Extension, Ithaca, NY.

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Editors note: This article is the thirteenth in a 15 part series that is provided through a joint initiative of Cornell University Cooperative Extension and the New York Forest Owners Association as an educational service that helps the citizen of New York enjoy, use, and sustain private rural lands. For more information on these and other topics, please contact your local office of Cornell Cooperative Extension or visit www.ForestConnect.info or www.NYFOA.org.