

Tips for Landowners to Maximize Hunting Efficiency

Which hunting seasons should be used? All available hunting seasons should be used to maximize deer population management.

Bow Season: Archery deer hunting is a silent and discreet method of taking deer. Since bow hunters prefer to hunt out of elevated portable tree stands, arrows travel short distances before striking the ground. Open lands surrounded by development may be hunted tactfully by archers.

Firearm Season: Deer hunting with modern firearms is the most popular deer hunting method. The use of shotguns or handguns is closely regulated on a county by county basis. Many hunters schedule their vacation around these seasons. Over 65% of all the deer harvested in Delaware are taken with firearms.

Muzzleloader Season: Muzzleloader deer hunting continues to grow in popularity in Delaware. Muzzleloaders have an effective range similar to a shotgun. Muzzleloaders are fired once and must be reloaded. Improvements in muzzleloader technology have increased the effectiveness of this one shot firearm.

How can landowners find potential hunters? Talk to hunters that are in your service club, your place of worship, your workplace or your hobby club. They may need a place to hunt or know of hunters that are looking for deer hunting property. Place a classified advertisement in a local newspaper which indicates that your farm or property is available for a deer hunting opportunities. Local sporting goods stores usually have areas where notices can be posted as well. Hunters also advertise their desire to lease properties at these locations. Income from creating a hunting lease can help to offset the monetary losses from deer damage.

Should landowners screen potential hunters on their property? In order to attract ethical, safe and effective hunters, landowners may require hunters to have a certain level of experience and training. Encourage hunters be graduates of Delaware's Master Hunter Education Course, or other additional training. Hunters that live close to the property may be able to hunt frequently, thus be more successful. To have the best chance to achieve harvest goals, select hunters with a number of years of deer hunting experience and a cooperative attitude. Don't

forget, you are the property owner, and you can set any rules or conditions to ensure hunters are safe and successful.

How many hunters should be on property? Have at least one hunter for each 25 acres of woodland open to hunting. It is possible to have a greater hunter density depending on the topography and surrounding property. During bow season, the density could be one bow hunter per 15 acres of woodland. Hunters should be distributed evenly across the property to maximize deer harvest. The most common error is to not have enough hunters distributed across the property.

How can hunter cooperation and safety be stressed? Meet with individual hunters or the hunting club prior to each season. Maps can be distributed at the meeting to indicate hunting areas, hazards and safety zones. Any rules can be discussed at this meeting. Hunting areas can be assigned which will ensure an even distribution of hunters and increase safety. Requiring the use of portable tree stands can increase safety. Shots taken from elevated tree stands create a quick downward flight of bullets or arrows. In future years, written information concerning any land use changes may be supplied to a hunting club spokesman which reduces the need for an annual meeting. Chronic violators of property rules should not be allowed to continue hunting the property.

How can the property owner encourage effective deer harvest? Open as much of your property to hunting as you feel comfortable with. Deer hunting on 400 acres of a 500 acre farm will more effectively manage deer than hunting only 100 acres of this farm. Hunter density (at least one hunter per 25 acres of woods) and hunter distribution across the property should be emphasized. Remember that the key element to controlling deer numbers is to harvest adequate numbers of adult does. Landowners can limit the number of antlered bucks harvested during the season. Hunters may be required to take one or more antlerless deer before harvesting an antlered buck during each season. There are many different ways for landowners to encourage adequate doe deer harvest. Some landowners make the hunting lease renewal dependent on a certain level of doe harvest. Other landowners have been successful by increasing the overall lease cost and then allowing the club to reduce it to an approved minimum level by harvesting a set number of does. The options are only limited by safety, the imagination of the landowner, and deer hunting regulations.

How can a landowner protect himself against potential liability related to deer hunting? Lawsuits brought by hunters against consenting landowners are extremely rare. Statute § 1501. Liability of owners or occupiers of land for injury to guests or trespassers within Title 25 – Property General Provisions, Chapter 15 – Tort Liability of Property Owners of the Delaware

code states, "No person who enters onto private residential or farm premises owned or occupied by another person, either as a guest without payment or as a trespasser, shall have a cause of action against the owner or occupier of such premises for any injuries or damages sustained by such person while on the premises unless such accident was intentional on the part of the owner or occupier or was caused by the willful or wanton disregard of the rights of others".

The following suggestions will help to further reduce the limited likelihood of any legal proceedings. Indicate on the property map any potential hazards. Hazards may include abandoned wells, old gravel pits, sink holes, cliffs or vacant buildings. If you are not sure if a feature is a hazard, place it on map to be safe. Make sure that all recreating on your property receive a copy of the map.

If you lease your property to a hunting club, require the club to acquire liability insurance coverage for hunting activities. This liability insurance will provide coverage for the landowner in the rare occurrence of a lawsuit. Contact your insurance agent for information regarding hunting liability insurance. Your hunting club may have access to liability insurance through non-profit conservation organizations.

How can the deer management program be evaluated? Damage to crops will stabilize and then decline when adequate numbers of deer are removed from the property. If hunter pressure is relatively stable, hunter success rates will generally follow deer population trends. As deer numbers stabilize and decline, the numbers of deer taken by the hunters will stabilize and then drop. If crop damage continues to increase and/or hunters success rate climbs, additional antlerless deer need to be removed. Be patient, it may take two to three years before you notice reduced crop damage. Once acceptable levels of crop damage have been achieved, a more balanced harvest of young and adult does, and mature bucks can be established. Without constant monitoring and hunting pressure, deer populations will quickly rebound to unacceptable levels.

Well managed deer hunting will effectively manage deer numbers when conducted on an annual basis. Using the preceding standards will provide for a professional and friendly relationship between the landowner and the hunting group. Hunters appreciate the opportunity to hunt and will cooperate with reasonable rules such as the ones indicated. A balanced hunting program will reduce trespass and littering problems as well as provide for effective deer management.