WHITETAIL
PARTNERS



February 22, 2026
Tyler,

It was a pleasure getting to spend some time with you and discuss your land! You are in a great location to start your new habitat journey. I was impressed with the diversity of this parcel, as well as the deer genetics from your trail cameras. This disciplined plan will jumpstart your goals of holding, growing, and harvesting mature bucks.

I hope you find this Habitat plan helpful to get you started and making use of the 2026 season.

Thank you for trusting me for your whitetail property needs. Please take your time with this plan and video and be sure to let me know what questions or adjustments are needed.

Lee Dixon
Whitetail Partners, LLC
901-317-8985

WHITETAIL PARTNERS

Habitat Plan Report - Table of Contents

Report and Habitat Plan

- Video Narratives
- Habitat Legend
- Owner Goals and Resources
- Habitat Plans
- Habitat Priorities
- Fall Food Plot Areas and Recommendations
- Soil Map
- Tree Purchase List
- Optional Items and Ideas
- Follow-up and Other Services
- Satisfaction, Referrals and Note of Thanks

References and Other Resources

- Habitat Plan Review, Layout and Implementation Tips
- Habitat Plan Legend and Definition of Terms
- Food Plot Seed
- Fertilizer, Trees and Timber Sales
- Background and Concepts on Design
- Prioritized Work List
- Habitat Work Calendar
- Recommended Tools and Products
- Recommended Reading
- Trail Camera Strategy
- Hunting the Seasons and the Weather
- Habitat Pictures from Our Properties

Video Narratives:

This report is structured to provide highlighted notes in list format under each subject along with video links where I discuss the points and give examples. While each section has a link to the referenced video, the first link is the complete playlist if you want to watch all of them in sequence.
These videos are private, but anyone who has the links below can view the videos (share with whomever you like).

Suggestion: I try to speak slowly and clearly in the videos, you may like to increase the speed of playback, click on the settings icon when watching the video to adjust, shown here:



Video Link:

Stand Access/Stand Review

Food Plots

Bedding

Travel Routes/Cameras





Habitat Legend

Schrader Habitat Plan	
Total Acres	36
Food Acres	1.33
% Food	3.69%
Sanctuary Integ	80%

Cell Cameras	
West	4
East	6
Total:	10

Stands	#
Box	3
Ladder	2
Lockon	1
Ground Blinds	0
Total:	6



Food Plots

Product	Acres	#/acre	#Total:	Plant Date
#1 Hammer Down Soybeans	0.45	40	18	5/15-6-15
#2 Legacy Blend	0.24	75	18	15-Sep
#3 Revival Clover	0.64	17	10.88	15-Sep

Click Stratton Seed Hyper Link below for easy seed selection.

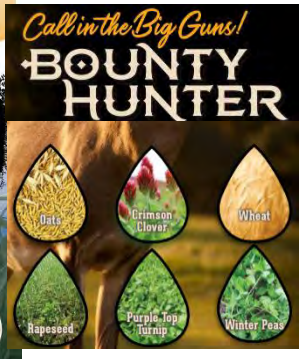
Stratton Seed











West Food Plot

Soils

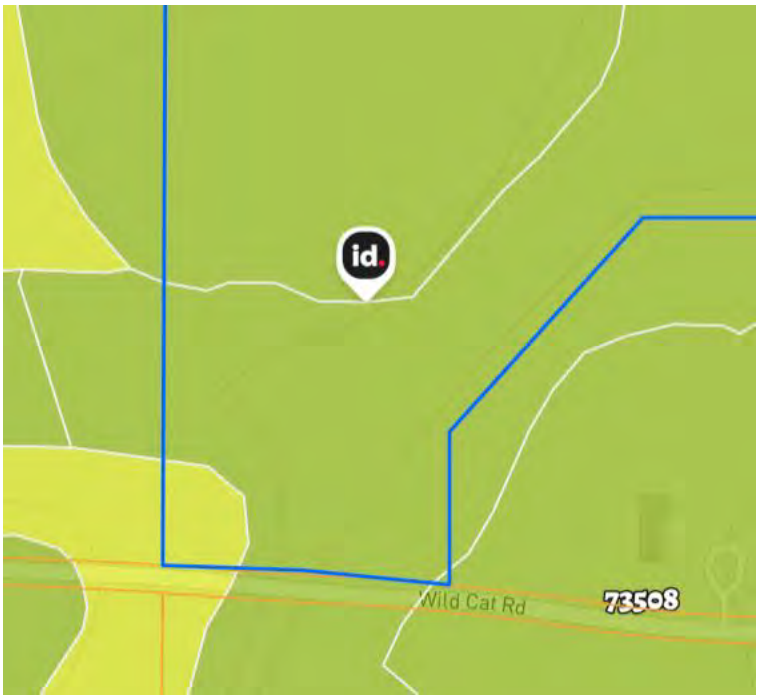
Non-Irrigated

Gladden silt loam, 0 to 2 percent slopes, frequently flooded

3w
Capability

Excess water.
Subclass w

Soils have limitations that reduce the choice of plants and/or require special conservation usually more difficult to apply and maintain. these soils may be used for cultivated crops, pasture, range, woodland, and wildlife.





Central Clover Plot

Soils

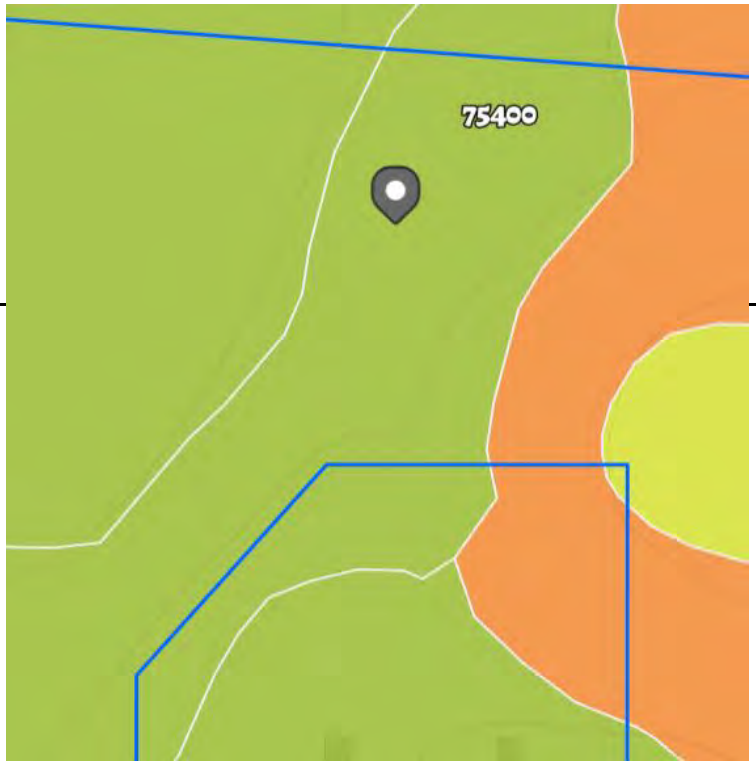
Non-Irrigated

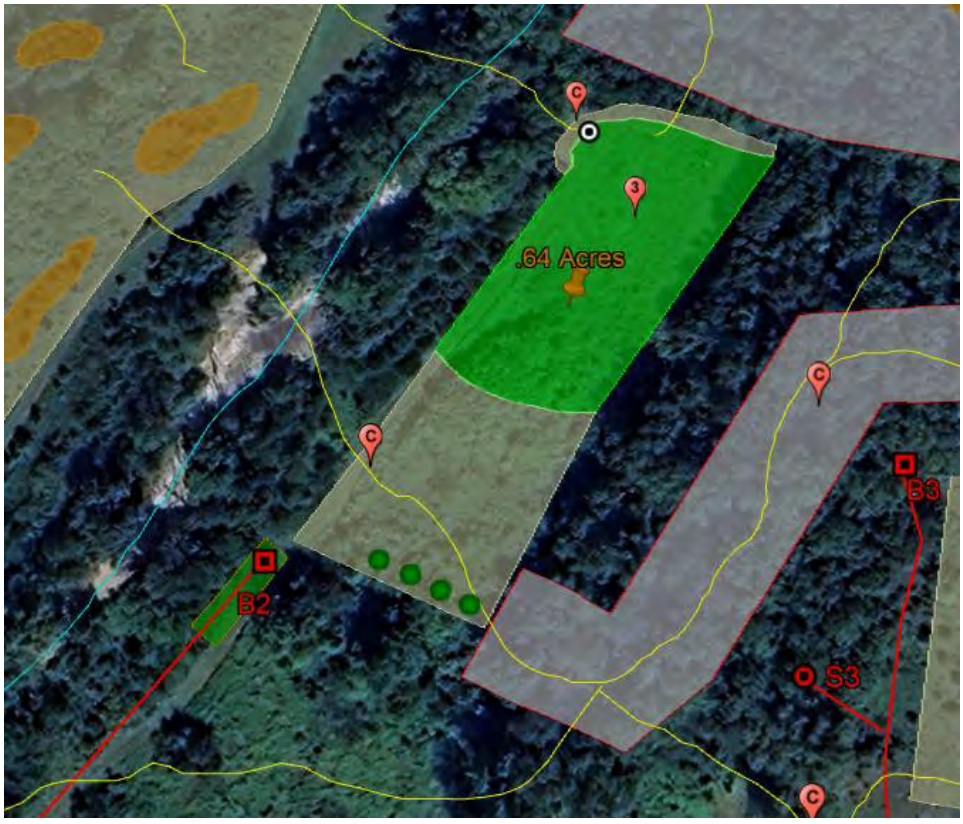
Gladden silt loam, 0 to 2 percent slopes, frequently flooded

3w
Capability

Excess water.
Subclass w

Soils have limitations that reduce the choice of plants and/or require special conservation usually more difficult to apply and maintain. these soils may be used for cultivated crops, pasture, range, woodland, and wildlife.





Deer Stand Legend:

- Note: Below are recommended times of day/peak opportunity zones based on observations in the field. Always leverage active intel from your strategically placed cellular cameras.
- Set all cameras to video mode. Tells more of the story.
- See Hunting the Season and Weather page for more detailed seasonal hunting tips.
-

Deer Stands	Wind	Time of Day	Rut Phase
S1	N,NE,E	AM,PM	PRE,PEAK,POST
S2	N,NW,W	AM	PRE,PEAK
S3	N,NE	AM	PRE/PEAK/POST

Deer Blinds	Wind	Time of Day	Rut Phase
B1	N,NW,W	PM	POST
B2	N,NE	AM/PM	PRE/PEAK/POST
B3	N	AM	PRE/PEAK/POST

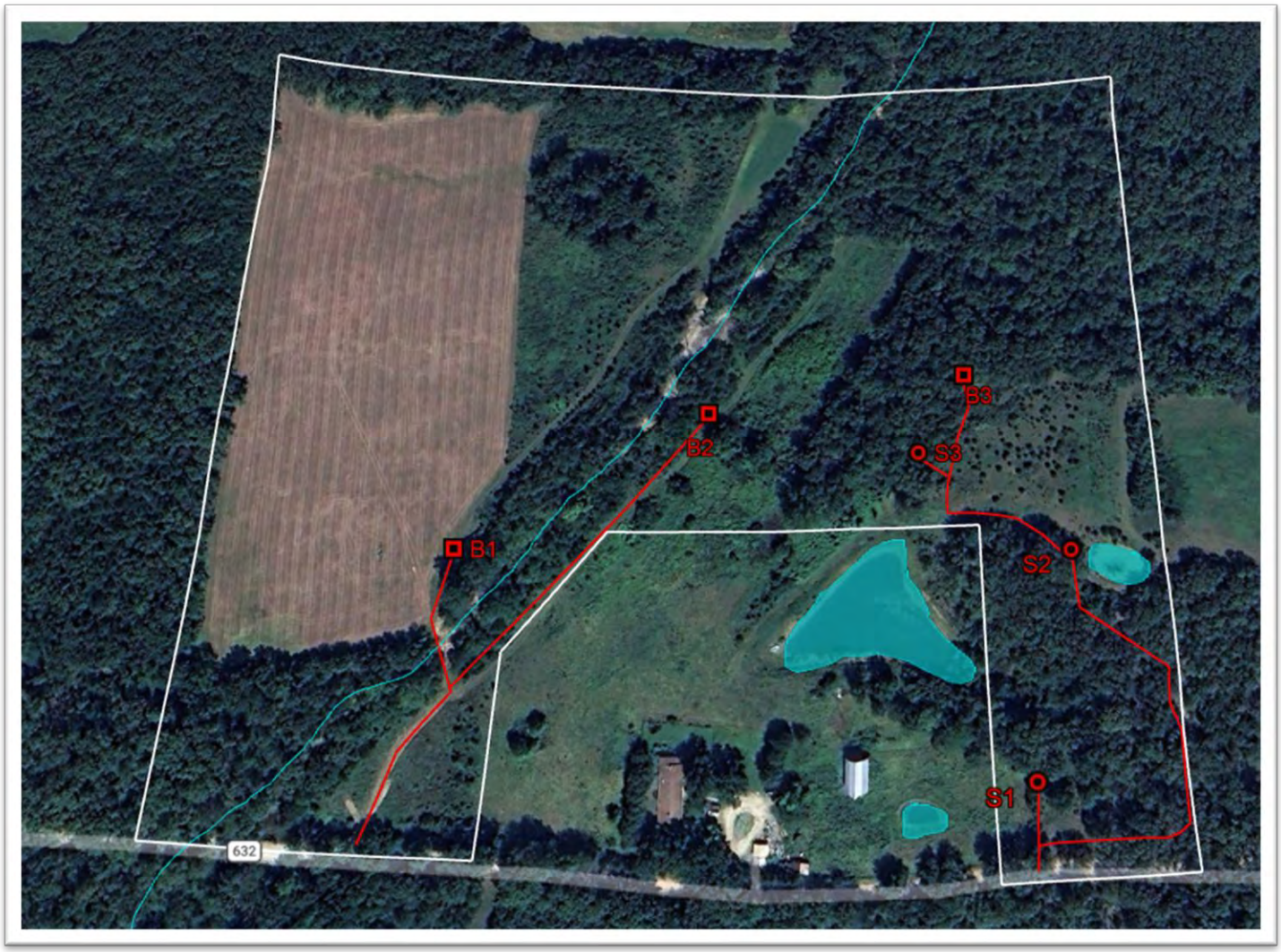






Access Is Key!

Access is a key! Note that the various hunting access routes are very time-of-day sensitive. A detailed explanation is included in the video narrative. Be careful to avoid being in the cover at the wrong time or risk blowing out your bucks!



Owner Goals and Resources:

It is important for an accurate plan to incorporate the needs and desires of the owner. The following topics we discussed may seem unnecessary to the report as the owner has internalized this information and is the given lens which they view their property and see the future. However, it is important for the design to identify the owner's perspective to approach with the right balance of goals, features, priorities, and cost considerations. Also, as goals or resources change, it is good to re-evaluate these items and make design adjustments over time.

Types of Hunting:

- Whitetails primary focus of this report.

Other Recreation:

- Recreational Deer Hunting is primary.

Timber Sales Requirements:

- Zero Timber harvest needed. Burn breaks are already established with existing roads/fields.

Hunter Physical Ability:

- Primarily by owners only, of whom can reach any locations on foot and climb into tree stands.
- Some blind locations will be offered for easy access as well and wind options (and blinds may be required where trees lack). More blinds can be added in time and are comfortable and safer for aging hunters or kids.
- Walking only access by foot or **E-Bike** is encouraged to reduce impact on the deer.
    - E-bike or E-vehicles for your property is a great idea! Particularly accessing the Blind 3 on the northeast side of your property.

Whitetail Goals:

- Attract and hold local whitetails.
- Develop Mature Buck Opportunities.
- Offer several diverse stand opportunities to hunt.

Means of Hunting:

- Stand locations will provide opportunity for rifle and bow. (Rifle is primary)

Skill Level and shot distance:

- Bow – most stands should be setup for not more than 20-30 yards and blinds as close as 15 yards for probable shot. Food locations will have the possibility for longer shots, reference lines shown usually at 30 and 50 yards.
- Gun – most locations similar to bow, except at food plots which could offer longer shots. Rifle locations will have 50 and 100 yard radiuses.

Equipment Available:

- Owner needs equipment investment.
- See also suggested equipment list

Budget Considerations:

- No reservations or limitations taken in the design. Plan can be broken up or scaled back if required.
- Take your time and prioritize each opportunity zone.

- *Be mindful of invasives like red cedar. Red Cedars do provide a certain amount of thermal cover for deer and other species of wildlife but left unchecked can take over a property.*
- *Kudzo is also a common problem in the south.*





Clover Plot Example:



The Crush "Holy Clover" Mix of Perennial and Annual clover mix. This clover mix is super easy to maintain. Your plots will look this luscious very soon!

Habitat Plans:

The following plans are also provided in .kmz (Google Earth) files. For zooming, editing and other features, please see the .kmz file.

Plan Overview (please see following pages for detail drawings).



Habitat Priorities:

See also “Top Priorities Work List” and “Habitat Work Calendar” in the reference materials. This does not replace those but is intended to focus on the site-specific items and owner situations.

2026 Focus / Worklist:

- Priority #1: Purchase soft mast/hard mast trees
  - ✓ Layout stands and corridors in winter – (WP layout)
  - ✓ Prep Bedding Cells/Travel routes
  - ✓ Use a lot of ribbon/Range Finder (Make sure plan is to spec)

- Food plots
  - ✓ **Food Plots** will need herbicide application ahead of planting. The ground has not been in a rotational food plot program. I recommend switching to no-till practices if possible.
  - ✓ Hinge cut strategic bedding areas around plots to secure our sanctuary bank.
  - ✓ Switchgrass edge needs to be planted asap. (Pg 61 tutorial) or Let it grow naturally.
  - ✓ Plant Hard Mast & Soft Mast orchards.

  - ✓ **Order trees ASAP**
    - Crab Apples/Pears
  - ✓ Nativ Nurseries/Whitetail Chestnut Hill/Chestnut Hill
- March/April: Plant Soft/Hard Mast trees (2026/27 target)
- June/July – Stands
- Set cameras Mid July
- Finalize access and clear it before season.
- Feb/March 2027 Prescribed Burn in your timber.

Assistance from Whitetail Partners:

- ✓ See also “Follow-up and Other Services” section of the report for more detail, but here are some highlights on items that may be helpful to get you started:
  - Field layout of habitat plan.
  - Cutting field day (build some areas together to transfer the skill)
  - Review habitat improvements and make recommendations
  - To learn more: https://www.whitetailpartners.com/field-services

Food Plot Areas and Recommendations:

Main Plots:

- Prep your soil in advance. Send soil test to ward labs or local co-op. Lime needs will need to be addressed sooner than later. Fertilizer can be applied ahead of planting.

- Prep food plots seed bed sooner than later. Maintaining weed control will make it much easier this fall.

- Spray herbicide on planting date of soybeans. (Avoid residual herbicides on grain blends Stratton Heritage blend and Hammer Down)

- Maintain weed control in all plots throughout the year. This will keep you ahead of the game when it comes time to plant. Too much thatch layer in a broadcast/drilling will limit seed to soil contact. Drilling is the preferred method.

- Switchgrass areas will need to be prepped asap. Remember the second year will get the most traction. See the switchgrass instructional page 61 for step-by-step tutorial. Large field needs prescribed fire.

It is important to note these seeding rates and measure the area in the field once it is made. The plan shows what is believed to be the area available, but it is important to verify. Also, shape may be modified to better fit the land.

Food Plots

- **Spring (5/15 to 6/15)**
- #1 Hammer Down Soybeans: 40 lbs an acre

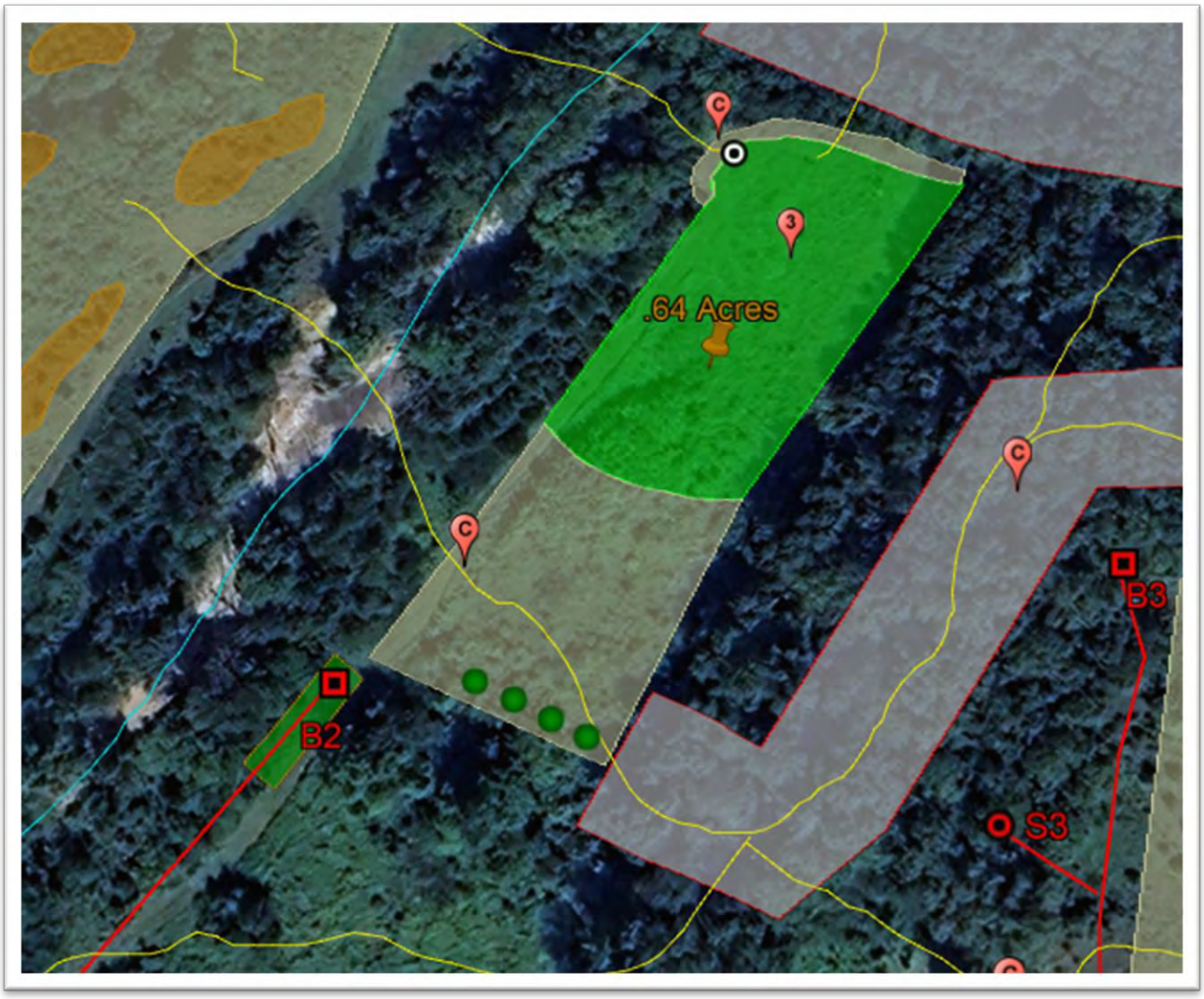
- **Fall Planting (8/15 to 9/30)**
- #2 Legacy Blend: 80 lbs per acre broadcasted (75 lbs Drilled)
- #3 Clover 17 lbs per acre (One 17lb bag Per Acre)

	Product	Acres	#/acre	#Total:	Plant Date
Food Plots	#1 Hammer Down Soybeans	0.45	40	18	5/15-6-15
	#2 Legacy Blend	0.24	75	18	15-Sep
	#3 Revival Clover	0.64	17	10.88	15-Sep

Soil Sample recommended on all Plots

Home - Ward Laboratories, Inc.

Central Clover Plot:



-**Secluded Clover Plot**

- This is a destination plot for your herd.

- #3 Light green is Stratton Seed Revival Clover Chicory Blend.
- Tan is switchgrass edge to encourage travel.
- 4 Sawtooth Oaks have been added for your hard mast needs.

	Product	Acres	#/acre	#Total:	Plant Date
Food Plots	#1 Hammer Down Soybeans	0.45	40	18	5/15-6-15
	#2 Legacy Blend	0.24	75	18	15-Sep
	#3 Revival Clover	0.64	17	10.88	15-Sep

West Destination Plot:



Destination Plot

- This is a destination plot for your herd.
- #1 Dark green is Stratton Seed Hammer Down Soybean Blend
- #2 Light green is Stratton Seed "Legacy" Wheat/Oat/Cereal Rye/Brassica blend.
- Tan is switchgrass edge to encourage travel.
- 4 Pears/Crab Apples were added for your soft mast orchards.
- Dark Green on access routes is Northwoods Whitetails Annual Screen.
- A natural browse plot was added. This includes Red Osier Dogwoods and Silky Dogwoods

	Product	Acres	#/acre	#Total:	Plant Date
Food Plots	#1 Hammer Down Soybeans	0.45	40	18	5/15-6-15
	#2 Legacy Blend	0.24	75	18	15-Sep
	#3 Revival Clover	0.64	17	10.88	15-Sep

East Bedding Plot:



Bedding Area

- This is bedding cover for your herd.

- Tan is switchgrass to increase cover with diversity pockets.
- 4 Pears/Crab Apples were added for your soft mast orchards.
- 3 Sawtooth Oaks have been added for your hard mast needs.

	Product	Acres	#/acre	#Total:	Plant Date
Food Plots	#1 Hammer Down Soybeans	0.45	40	18	5/15-6-15
	#2 Legacy Blend	0.24	75	18	15-Sep
	#3 Revival Clover	0.64	17	10.88	15-Sep

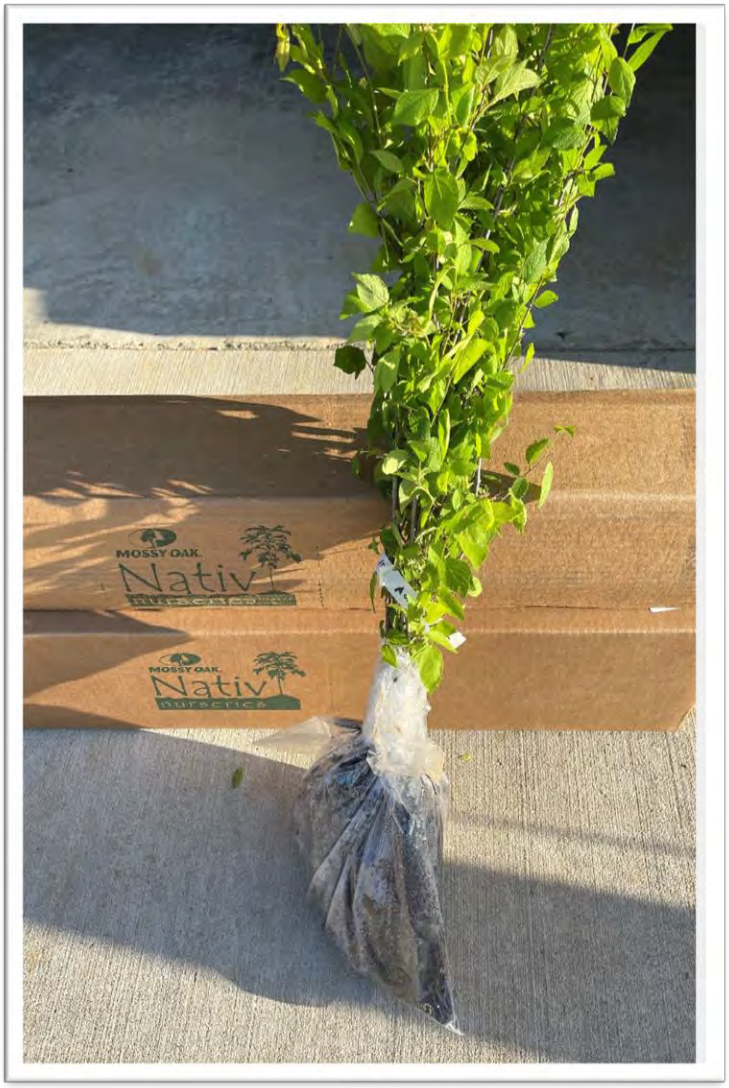
Timber Improvement:



- This is a future sanctuary for your herd. Also increases forage.

- Light Grey is current TSI work.
- The gray linear TSI blocks will encourage Sanctuary and travel through your property hitting strategic kill zones. The open canopy will promote dense ground cover that mature bucks love.
- Remove low value trees (Gum, Elm, Maple,etc…)
- TSI methods: Double Girdle with chainsaw, Hack and Squirt method (Garlon 3A Herbicide). 1 hack per 1 inch diameter tree. Avoid herbicide applications during heavy sap flows. Mid-Late Summer is an ideal timeframe.
- Tree Felling: Tree cut with chainsaw.
- 2-year Rotational prescribed fire. Turkey nesting will suffer if you burn annually.

Tree Purchase List:



-Soft Mast

- **Kieffer Pear: 6x**
- **Crab Apple: 2x**

-Hard Mast

- **Sawtooth Oak: 10x**

-Natural Browse

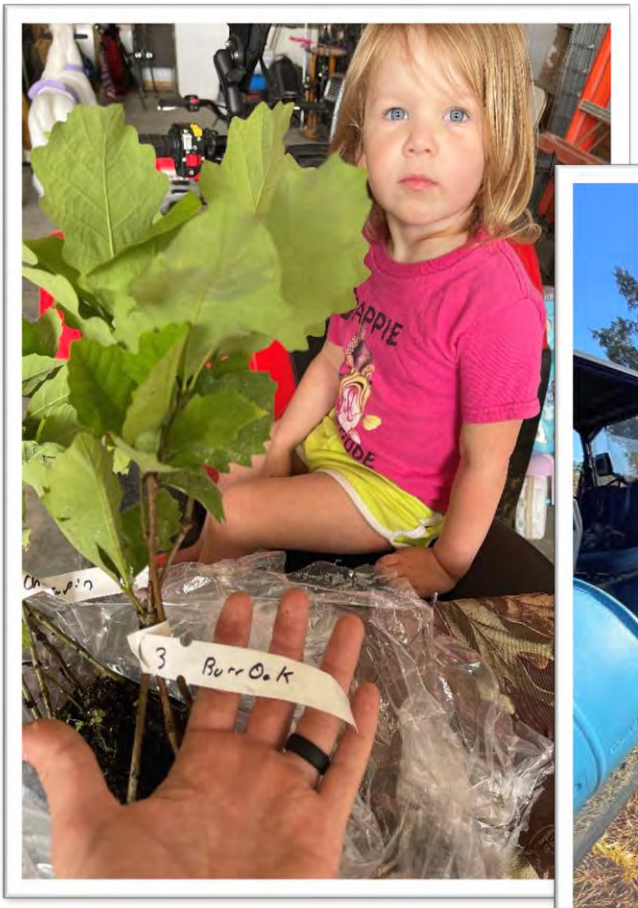
- **Silky Dogwood: 25x**

- **Note: I put a few extra soft & hard mast trees in your order in case of failed plantings.**

-Please make ordering these trees a priority. Limited availability in some cases.

-Protect your investment with tree tubes or fence 6' radius around tree.

Recommended Tree Companies:





1. https://www.nativnurseries.com/

2. https://whitetailhillchestnuts.com/

3. https://chestnuthilltreefarm.com/

4.https://www.tn.gov/agriculture/forests/seedlings.html

Or Call This gentleman:

Michael Hagerty

Mobile: 615-400-6538

Optional Items and Ideas:

Accent Features:



- Pollinator and other prairie plantings offer a visual appeal to the landscape and have positive benefits for birds, bees, and soft mast trees for pollination. Shapes and other locations such as strips in switch grass or bordering plots can add a nice visual appeal to the design and can be placed where desired by owner.
- Though not always indicated in the design, these substitutions can be made for switchgrass or CRP plantings except where screening for hunter access is needed (height of switchgrass is needed).
- Adding touches like these are fun ways for the family to be included. Ready-to-cut flowers, pumpkin patches, berry patches, vineyards, and more are good ways to include all.

Plant Trees, Grow Memories:

- Trees in unique locations add a nice personal touch and are fun watch grow. They may not be specifically for habitat, but never hurt to add some more diversity.
- They can be named for those who helped – “that’s the kid’s tree”, or as a memorial, “That one was planted to honor grandpa who first took me hunting”.
- I’ve even seen people put small plaques at the base of trees that were spread about the walking path through the property and can add to the legacy and ties to the land.

Follow-up and Other Services:

Are you looking for more hands-on help? Whether you need simple guidance getting started or full service to get the job done there are additional ways I can provide a helping hand, you can also visit www.whitetailpartners.com/services to learn more. I am here to serve your needs – please call if I can help! I enjoy finding solutions to the problems you may encounter, and it is exciting for me to hear about your projects.

Consulting, Design and Field Services:

- Property layout, including any habitat features of this plan
- Annual follow-up property review and plan update
  - Intensive scouting and performance evaluation of the plan
  - Develop itemized list of actions to reinforce the habitat
  - Plan updates due to changing owner goals, resources or neighbor impacts
- Pre-purchase land review
  - New parcel or land adjacent to your existing parcel



Getting started on transferring the concept of a habitat plan to the layout of the land can be challenging. Reading the land, local deer sign and knowing how to direct travel is a key component to making a habitat plan come together.

Habitat Construction:
(Doing the work, or teaching you how)
Some of these tasks may have the appearance of basic labor. I can assure you that there are critical details that make this skilled work. For example – what, where, when, why and how to cut a tree, not simply cutting it down.



In addition, all activities come a fully outfitted ATV habitat tool rig including chainsaws, gas, habitat hooks, hand tools, safety equipment, marking tape and other minor incidentals combined with the experience to move efficiently and provide a high value for the work.

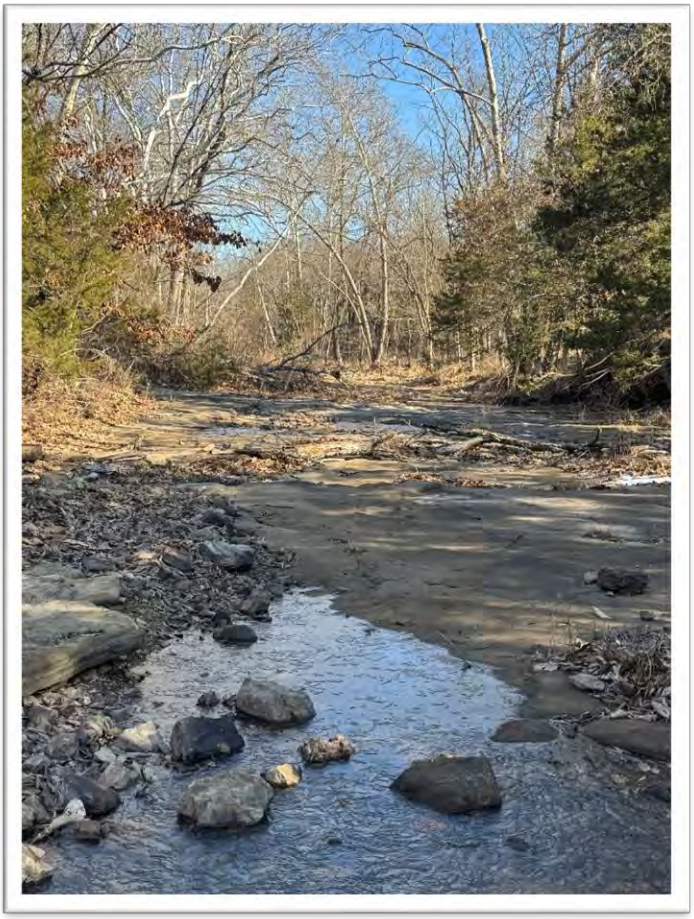
- Posting “No Trespassing” signs with accuracy and attention to GPS location of property lines and identifying probable locations of trespassing
- Cutting of bedding and travel corridors
- Waterhole installation and maintenance
- Mock Scrape installation and maintenance
- Switchgrass frost seeding and maintenance
- Trail mowing (30” walk behind)

Pricing:
- Please call to discuss your needs, every job is unique
- Services are often charged with a daily fee
- Projects can also be quoted as a fixed fee if preferred by the owner

Schedule:
- I have a growing demand for my services and am already filling my calendar for the prime habitat time of December through April.
- Often an annual follow-up property review is combined with habitat work to implement immediate results on the hunt you are working to create.
- Please call me to discuss – 901-317-8985

Habitat and Hunting Coaching:
- I now offer personal one-on-one coaching sessions tailored to your needs. We can work to improve your habitat and hunting knowledge to take your property and hunting to the next level. To learn more visit: www.whitetailpartners.com/coaching

Satisfaction, Referrals and Note of Thanks:



Tyler,
I hope you find this report, habitat plan and other information clear, helpful and motivating for you to enjoy whitetail habitat and hunting as much as I do! If there are any questions I have left unanswered or expectation unmet, please call me so that I can ensure your satisfaction with what I have provided.

The greatest complement I can receive is for you to refer your friends and family who may also benefit from my services. My goal is not to market to the masses to burn through properties and habitat plans, but rather to keep a small group of trusted clients who I can partner with for years to come and consistently meet their needs by providing a high value for my services.

Thank you for choosing me for your whitetail property needs. I greatly appreciate the opportunity to know you better and build your trust. I hope you enjoy the habitat work, are excited for the vision presented for your property, and have many great experiences with friends and family in the years to come!

Lee Dixon
Whitetail Partners, LLC
901-317-8985
www.whitetailpartners.com

REFERENCES AND OTHER RESOURCES

Habitat Plan Review, Layout and Implementation Tips

- Review Habitat Improvement Features and Definition of Terms one at a time and study those features on the plan.
- Refer to "Background and Concepts on Design" section to have a deeper understanding of principles of the design.
- Effort has been taken to locate features as close to the actual location as possible, however, field adjustments will be necessary for a variety of reasons.
    - Adequate treestand trees are not available, though a blind can be substituted in some situations.
    - Adequate bedding trees (felling and hinging) are not available.
    - Terrain dictates modification
        - For example, a treestand may need to be moved further up on a slope to have adequate site distance.
- For tree stands and corridors in timber:
    - Start by locating the tree to be used for a treestand
        - It is good to locate a second tree nearby that could work if you lose the tree you select.
        - Note that while a location is noted on the plan, it is a good idea to set complementary stands (2nd or 3rd) within a short distance from the first to help with varied wind directions.
    - Then locate the corridor
        - Note waterholes and mock scrapes should be on relatively flat surfaces (even smaller flat surfaces along a slope will work.
        - When multiple stands are to be set along the corridor, determine the next stand before trying to layout the corridor – then connect the points.
    - Mark corridor (preferably before spring green-up) heavily with large pieces of marking tape.
        - Note what trees you will fell/hinge as you layout the corridor.
        - Paint marking trees can be helpful
    - Please call me to help! Getting the layout in is sometimes the hardest part!
- Blinds:
    - It is tempting (and the view is nice) to elevate a blind. However, the more evident a blind is the more avoided it will be by the deer. Consider putting blinds as low to the ground as necessary for the hunting application.
    - Screening around blind is helpful as well… annual plot screen, switchgrass, conifer plantings.
- For improvements in open areas (switchgrass, birds/bees, food plots, plot screen, etc.)
    - Layout with marking flags (like those used to hotline utilities)
    - If frost seeding, put these down immediately following hunting season.
- Follow-up with Lee:
    - Is a feature you wanted to have is missing or does not meet your needs?
    - Find a problem with a portion of the plan or the field-fit doesn't seem to be working?
    - Get stuck or just need help?
    - **Please call me to revise the plan or trouble-shoot. I want you to be successful!**

Habitat Improvement Legend and Definition of Terms (PLAN LEGEND)

Many of the following features may appear on the plan. Some may not be included as the plan did not call for the feature. All are listed as these are essentially the "tools in the toolbox" for design. Descriptions are given to aid in understanding the objective of the feature.

Existing Conditions:



Grey lines – Property Boarders



White Lines – Existing or Proposed Road/Trail System



Blue Areas – Lake/Pond

- Water is deep enough that deer would not easily go through it
- Existing pond, lake river or seasonally wet area.
- May be a proposed pond to be excavated
- Not to be confused with waterholes on travel corridors



Blue Lines – Drainages and Streams (if not obvious on Google Earth)

- Not necessarily running water, may be seasonably dry
- Major purpose is to define steep drainages, usually in timber that deer do not like to cross if an alternative route is available

Food Sources:



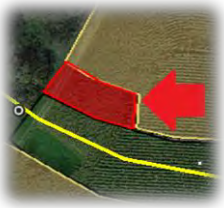
Two-Tone Green Area – Fall Food Source

- Consistent fall food attraction and is the anchor in the habitat design establishing the desired destination of travel
- Generally planted around Aug 1
- Grain on one side, mixed variety
    - Ex. Oats/Peas/Beans with Sept 1. Over-seed cereal rye or wheat
- Brassica blend on the other side
- Split plots lengthwise or by direction of stand, rotate annually



Light Yellow Area – Late Season / Winter Food Source

- Provide strong food source late in season and into winter in addition to brassicas
- Spring planted agricultural grains (Ex. corn)



Red Areas or Dots – Soft Mast

- Used in addition to food plots to strengthen attraction
- Apples - Recommended to select a variety of types to reduce potential for disease and have varying drop times throughout season
- Pears are another good option for deer

Bedding and Cover:



Brown Areas – Regenerative Cover

- Provides bedding in currently open areas
- Produced by planting seeds, cuttings, bear root, or potted plants
- Bushes, shrubs, conifers, and fast growing hardwoods
- Sporadic and random locations, not rows
- Porous so when maturity occurs it is not crowded
- Generally in open areas or ones with more unevenly distributed cover
- Sometimes shown in switch grass to provide diversity



Orange Areas – Timber Bedding

- Generally for doe bedding near food
- .25-.5 acre areas, separated by at least 10-15 yards of open timber
- 60-80% canopy reduction
- Fall large trees first in a safe direction of fall
- Hinge cut smaller trees second, in random pattern
    - Higher cut on outside if intended to be porous
    - Hip height cuts on inside for side cover and browse
- Clear trails around and through fallen trees
    - Irregular, lots of turns. Think “maze”
    - Clear anything 5’ and lower on trails unless living hinge
    - May need to cut some hinged trees here and there.
- Clear small beds, pockets to dirt
- Logs for backing are nice, but not necessary
- White spruce in small groups 3-5 to provide diversity within bedding and cover as hinge cuts die.

Orange Areas, Green Outline – Conifer Bedding Improvement



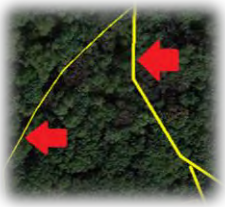
- Though some timber may be removed in these bedding areas to allow more sunlight in, the focus here is to generate thermal cover by planting conifers.
- Researching the correct type (often shade tolerant species) will aid in success
- Also planting in places that will get limited rubbing (such as a tree top or other debris) and guard it in the early years.

Mustard area, Green Outline – Willow Regeneration or Corridors



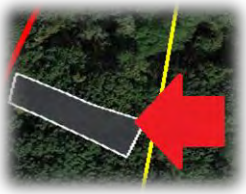
- Willows (or River Birch) are excellent options for wet soils to add side cover, edge and variety on the habitat.

Deer Travel:



Yellow Lines – Travel Routes

- Heavier lines – major deer routes, doe and buck
- Finer lines – buck route, generally an alternative route on an overall movement that is attractive to bucks
- Avoid straight lines, should wander and weave naturally
- Avoid sharp corners, make sweeping corners
- Timber setting – trees felled or hinged perpendicular to path
- Porous perpendicular to direction of travel (escape)
- Clear to dirt, remove obstructions or trees fallen on route
    - Spray glyphosate in July
- 2-3' wide, ok to be wider if trees dictate. Not necessary to over-clear
- Be mindful of over-hanging timber
    - Remove if unstable or may collapse and block route.
- Field setting – mow 2' wide trail and/or spray. Cut or killed around Labor Day



Dark Grey Area with White Outline – Blockers

- Designed to be a travel blocker and emphasize an adjacent travel route
- Creates a pinch point
- An elongated perpendicular cutting to ensure deer are pinched on one side to use the travel route
- Can sometimes be done with one or two larger trees, but sometimes several small ones are needed – or relocated brush from other areas.
- Eliminate bedding along edges if found as these are associated with hunter access, deer use for bedding is discouraged
- Ensure good escape route on opposite side, not too defining – like a gate would be
- Inspect from time to time to ensure deer are not crossing it



Green Strips - Kill Plots and Trail Plots

- Used to strengthen route of travel and attraction
- Not intended to be destination food source
- Intended to encourage pass-through movement, not staying attraction
- Often made with switchgrass screening, as shown in example
- Trail plots may be as narrow as 10', kill plots as wide as 25 yards
- Minimum 1: 5 ratio width: length
- These make good defining hunting locations with access
- Clover or Chicory are good options, particularly if shaded
- Quality of forage is secondary to setup and screening

Deer Travel Continued:



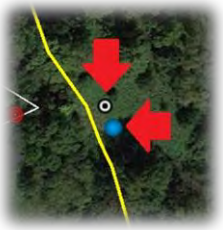
Dark Grey Area with Black Outline – Grey Dogwood Corridor

- Means of creating corridor through open area
- Provides screening and browse along route
- Generally used in upland, well drained soils



Red Shaded Area – Red Dogwood Corridor

- Means of creating corridor through open area
- Provides screening and browse along route
- Generally used in lowland, wet soils
- Can easily be transferred by cuttings if locally available



Black & White Dots - Mock Scrapes and Blue Dots - Waterholes

- Used to strengthen route of travel and attraction
- Mock Scrapes:
    - 4-5’ section of ¾”-1” grape vine
    - Attached to above branch or paracord between two trees
    - Bottom of vine is at hip height
    - Should be positioned on roughly flat ground, it will not get used if on a slope
    - Clear ground under mock scrape with stick or rake
    - Urinate on ground to start the use.
    - May be used at non-stand locations to strengthen movement
- Waterholes
    - 110 gallon Tractor Supply Store – hard plastic
    - Bury 3-4” below surface. Dirt will settle to 1-2”
    - Make sure ~10’ radius drains toward waterhole
        - An average year rain will keep the waterhole full
    - Put on opposite side of corridor from stand
    - Include a mock scrape at each waterhole, within 10-15’
    - Excellent camera location (get both waterhole and mock scrape from same camera)
    - MUST-HAVE stand location, recommended not less than 20 yards and not more than 30 yards

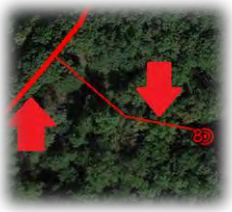
Deer Travel Continued:



White Triangles – Improved Stream Crossing

- Means of continuing a corridor through across a stream bank
- Often streams have steep banks, work to cut down each side and improve the ease of a deer to cross at that location.
- Can also add gravel/silt to stream bed to reduce depth at the location
- Often complemented with barricading other crossings to increase use of intended design corridor.

Hunter – Access and Stands/Blinds:



Red Lines – Hunter Access

- Heavier lines are major access, interior trail system
- Finer lines are hunter sneak access
    - Generally perpendicular to stand and deer movement
- Small trails, cleared of sticks and logs
- Some perpendicular debris can be place to deer from approaching the treestand



Red Bullseyes and Boxes – Stands and Blinds

- Bullseyes are tree stands, could be hang on or ladder.
    - Could be replaced by blind if tree is not present or personal preference
- Boxes are blinds
    - Need good concealment and only enough elevation for proper vision
    - If on a food source – need to be hidden and blend in with surroundings for lowest impact



Clear Area with White Lines (White polygon) – Non-Deer Areas

- Areas designated to not hold deer, typically used for hunter access
- These areas are generally unimproved if mature timber
- Eliminate any lower cover, scape trees, bedding
- Corridors guide deer away from these areas

Screening and Other Features:



Tan Area – Switchgrass Screening

- Used to separate hunter access from deer
- Used to separate deer from deer in food sources
- Used to screen deer (buck) view of food sources
- Bedding and thermal cover
- Superior grass through winter conditions



Dark Green Area – Conifer Screening

- Long-term screening
- Norway spruce is excellent



Pink Area – Pollinator Mix

- Used to provide diversity within habitat plan
- Added when sufficient screening has been established
- Positive aesthetic appeal
- Aids in pollination of fruit trees
- Provides some summer/early season food but fades quickly in fall



Olive Areas on Edge of Fields – Edge Feathering

- Felling larger and hinging smaller trees into open areas.
- Softens edge between open areas and cover.
- More approachable for deer to gain comfort into open
- Make sure switchgrass is established before cuttings



Brown Lines within Switchgrass – Regenerative Cover

- Switchgrass is utilized as short term side cover for a trail plot or dogwood corridor through an open area
- Plantings of fast growing hardwoods or conifers are placed within to regenerate cover for the long term

Food Plot Seed:

- If you have a preferred seed source, use it! I'm not too partial on the grains, those can be obtained from any local co-op or seed distributer you want to support. Plan to buy those locally as the shipping of these products from regional or national vendors can be very expensive with the amount of seed needed. You will also want to procure these products no later than June 1 as they can become difficult to obtain or at retail only pricing.
- For the brassica and tillage radish I do recommend finding a no-frills source and not buy products with a big buck on the bag as the bag usually contains several fillers and buzz-words.
- Here is a picture of the Sweet Feast Brassica Blend and Tillage Radish. Some products even come in a ziplock bag. All seed, no junk.



Brassica blend and tillage radish – a highly effective, low cost option for plots.

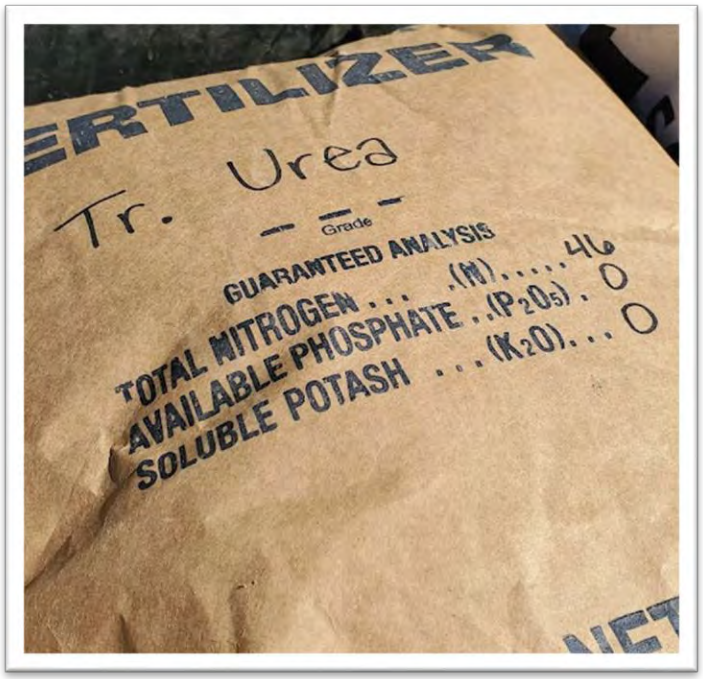
Grain seed from a local distributor fills the back of my truck in late July. Planting food plots is a fun part of habitat management!



Fertilizer:

Do not buy fertilizer at a big box store. It can be purchased at much better prices at a local farm store. They also carry Urea (46-0-0) which can be difficult to find, and pricing is very reasonable.

Most farm stores, seed stores or co-ops are the place you want to go.



Seeding small seeds such as plot screens and brassicas, it is very important to NOT overseed. Measure your area, calculate the seed and then WEIGH it out. Spread seed very sparingly in one direction, then repeat in another direction, then in another. It is better to go over it three or more times lightly than to run out of seed before finishing the area. I keep a small postage scale in my toolbox for this reason.



Tree Species (Southern Based):

Selecting regional specific trees for various soil types are important. The "Trees of Tennessee" book is the good reference, but here are some basic tips, and are also species provided in bare root:

- Hardwoods:
  - Wet conditions:
    - River birch, willow, red maple, black maple, swamp white oak, boxelder (excellent for hinge cutting)
  - Dry conditions:
    - poplar, white oak (excellent acorns)
- Conifers:
  - Wet conditions:
    - Black spruce, Balsam Fir, White cedar
  - Dry conditions:
    - White spruce
      - Shade tolerant, limited browse by deer
      - Good for bedding, screening,
    - Norway spruce
      - Browse tolerant (will get browse, but can take it)
      - Great for screens or mixed in diversity pockets
    - Red pine
      - Fast growth for screen, but lose lower branches in time.
      - If used in screen, have lines of Red pines and Norway spruce.
    - White pine
      - Good for screens, but hard survivability with heavy browse
      - Requires bud caps until 7' tall.
- Shrub/bush:
  - Red Dogwood – wet soils
  - Grey Dogwood – dry to damp soils
  - Ninebark – dry to damp soils

Forestry and Timber Sales:

If you are considering a timber sale as a part of your habitat plan implementation, I recommend finding independent, private forester who will work with you to meet your needs while getting reputable loggers and timber buyers coordinated for the cut. You will want to seek out an independent consultant who can help you ensure a quality job.



Timber Cut Tips:

- Sell the timber at the mill or auction logs. Do not sell the timber standing. You will earn less.
- Ask the forester to only recommend a quality logger who will respect the land.
- Create a contract to have written terms and formalize agreements.
    - Keep it simple. Too much legal will drive away the forester/logger.
- Discuss the landing area – this is where the logs will be placed.
- Discuss the access routes and restoration. Logging equipment can leave ruts and other damage to the roads and other access points.
- Plan the work to be done in winter for the least disturbance possible. Frozen ground is ideal.
- Discuss what will be done with the tops. Pulled back into timber? Pulled out into field?
    - Some tops are good for wildlife if they provide side structure.
    - Too many tops (piles) can be counterproductive and a mess.
    - Do not leave piles around food plots.
- Mark trees you want to keep (or mark trees you want cut).
    - Be sure to mark a dot at base of tree you want cut (to check that they don't cut trees you didn't intend to cut).
- Be on site during the cutting.
- Plan to have a walk-through when logging is done, but before equipment leaves to verify agreement was kept.
- Do not pay them until they have met your requirements.

- **Background and Concepts on Design:**

Below are the major habitat concepts I promote and are the basis for how the plan is designed. If there are any questions regarding these concepts, or how they relate to the way your habitat plan is laid out, please call to discuss.

- **Fall Parcel**
  - Every aspect is designed to peak in the fall and be the proper habitat for fall hunting.
  - You may not have the summertime (prior to mid-September) deer activity due to the type of improvements created and lack of summer food. As bucks shift to fall habitat, pictures and sightings will consistently increase over time if pressure is minimized.
  - Utilize and enjoy your land! I am working on my property every month outside of the hunting season (see Habitat Work by the Month later in report).
- **Deer and Hunter needs in Harmony**
  - Deer needs – bedding, travel, food
  - Hunter needs – access (huntability)
  - Plan must account for these two needs not being in conflict
- **No Plan = Chaos**
  - Random improvements make for random deer
  - Improvements must be connected and relate to each other
  - Patterns are continuous and unending
- **Outside-In vs. Inside-Out**
  - Hunt primarily from the outside of the property or risk pushing deer off.
  - Strive to keep the footprint of human activity to the minimum amount during the season.
- **Parallel Improvements**
  - Every improvement is intended to direct and steer back into the property.
  - Movements are flowing, gentle, without sharp changes.
  - Hunter access should be perpendicular to the line of movement to minimize conflict points.
- **Layered Bedding and Length of Travel**
  - Does close to food, then bucks. Not enough length and the bucks will be on the neighbors.
  - Longer the better. Consistent attraction and improvements along the way.
- **Timber Stand Improvement (TSI) - 30% canopy reduction**
  - TSI is not labeled on plan – is necessary in most areas where woods is mature and open.
  - Includes putting subordinate or junk trees down periodically, every 30-40 yards.
  - Provides screening and reduced sight distance but not thick enough to be preferred bedding.
- **Hunt the Travel, not the Food**
  - “Corridors are King”
  - Several methods to improve and strengthen movement
    - Kill plots
    - Trail plots
    - Mock Scrapes
    - Waterholes

- The fall food is the anchor of attraction, but consider this a deer sanctuary, not a place to hunt.
- Any hunting opportunities on food shall be done from a hidden blind with very secure access.

- **Food plot consistency:**
  - Plots across the property should contain the same crops in order to have consistency of how deer relate to the food. Random assortment across the property create random deer movement and competition in the herd.
  - Diversity *within* each plot is very important to keep a high level of attraction throughout the season. Each type of food is at peak attraction for only a portion of the season. Combining seeds into a blend will provide the best opportunity for peak attraction throughout the season.



Top Priorities Work List:

- First Year Priorities
  - 80% of the results come from 20% of the work. This list is intended to help focus on the highest priorities.
    - If work is beginning at the start of the year, the Habitat Work Calendar can be followed. The following items are intended to pull out the highest priorities and big picture.
  - Foundation of Food
    - Organizing food plots with summer planted fall greens is the #1 priority for the season.
    - Having fall food in place will start/continue to pattern the deer to the location and protect them to get older.
  - Access
    - Access to stands and blinds is key to successful hunting. This includes fields and timber travel routes. Dozer work, tree planting, frost seeding of switchgrass and spring planting of annual screening are key or the hunt will be over before it starts.
  - Stands:
    - Prioritize top treestand locations – by waterholes and bedding areas.
      - Choose trees and cut shooting lanes before green-up.
      - Stands can be put up in the summer.
  - Travel Corridors
    - Defining deer travel to connect food and bedding and how they relate to hunting opportunities is key.
    - Travel corridors are able to be cut after green-up more easily than TSI and bedding areas, keep these for last.
  - Waterholes and Mock Scrapes
    - Though corridors are needed to define these improvements, these two items are key for anchoring the travel.
  - Holding Cover
    - TSI – Timber Stand Improvement for visual breakup and lower deer stress.
    - This is generally dropping larger trees every 30-40 yards in an irregular pattern.
  - Doe, then Buck Bedding:
    - Focus first on getting doe bedding by food sources
    - Buck bedding is second priority (TSI will accomplish much of this already).
  - TIP: Layout before green-up
    - Locating improvements accurately must be done before green-up.
      - Treestands, bedding, travel, waterholes, mock scrapes, etc.
    - Consider layout services from Whitetail Partners.
    - Do not layout areas that will not be worked on. Excess ribbons in woods may spook deer.
- Second Year Priorities and Beyond:
  - Schedule annual property review with Whitetail Partners.
  - Follow Habitat Work Calendar

Habitat Work Calendar

January

- ✓ Review property with Whitetail Partners to game plan for the habitat season.
- ✓ Capture detailed drone footage of wooded areas days after a snowfall to see deer trails.
- ✓ Post season scouting
- ✓ Mapping deer sign
- ✓ Layout corridors and bedding areas
- ✓ Cutting - TSI, bedding, corridors, clearings, treestand shooting lanes
    - If no snow move and do as much as possible, access becomes difficult after snow cover
- ✓ Tool maintenance
- ✓ Budgeting for year
- ✓ Neighbor Relations:
    - Co-op, QDM meetings or 1:1 discussions to work toward common goals.
    - Sign lease/agreement if applicable
    - Send letter or visit neighbors to make them aware of your interest to purchase a portion of their land and repeat annually

February

- ✓ Frost seed switchgrass
- ✓ Cutting - TSI, bedding, corridors, clearings, treestand shooting lanes
- ✓ Seed orders
- ✓ Tree orders
- ✓ Review stand locations and determine if additional stands should be considered.

March

- ✓ Cutting - TSI, bedding, corridors, clearings
- ✓ Brush mowing areas of new clearing (access, etc.)
- ✓ Frost seeding clover
- ✓ Simazine on switchgrass (Year 1 and 2) 2 weeks before green-up.
- ✓ Shed hunt and pull out cams

April

- ✓ Cutting - TSI, bedding, corridors, clearings
- ✓ Plant trees
- ✓ Camera maintenance
- ✓ Late April spray switch (Year 1) with glyphosate and 2-4D
- ✓ Late April-early May spray plots (spraying 1) with gly– not more than 12” weeds.
- ✓ Dig buck beds on hill sides

May

- ✓ Early May – spray plots if not done in late April
- ✓ Waterhole install and maintenance
- ✓ Initial corridor review, confirm mock scrape trees and make materials list
- ✓ Late May – plant buckwheat if doing no-till plots – 50# per acre
- ✓ Inspect tree stands and shooting lanes

June

- ✓ Early June – spray plots (spraying 2)
- ✓ Hang and inspect tree stands
  - Check straps and life lines - any sign of wear remove and replace
- ✓ Put out cameras
- ✓ Clear hunter access trails
- ✓ Brush mow bedding areas
- ✓ Mock Scrapes – inspect and place new

July

- ✓ Finalize tree stands and shooting lanes
- ✓ Early to mid-July – spray plots (3rd and final spraying)
- ✓ End of July, early August – Fall food source planting (watch weather)
- ✓ Scouting by the weather (note activity and weather)
- ✓ Clean out / spray bedding areas

August

- ✓ Any missing items finish up
- ✓ Overseed any bear spots in fall food plots
- ✓ Limit intrusion to cover areas
- ✓ Make good noise with anything you do (don't sneak up and spook)

September

- ✓ Early September – last touch to the land before hunting season, no intrusion to any unneeded areas
- ✓ Overseed winter rye on grain side of fall food plots around Labor Day
- ✓ Implement access plan for all hunters through the end of season

October-December

- ✓ Enjoy the hunt with family and friends!
- ✓ Continue to implement access plan for all hunters
- ✓ Only get trail cams when going to a stand or mid-day on fields
- ✓ Schedule property visit with Whitetail Partners to review and improve habitat implementation plan in the post-season.

Recommended Tools and Products

Chainsaw – The #1 Habitat Tool!

- Stihl MS 180-211 for small work.
    - I have a 211 and it is easy to use with enough power to cut down all but the largest trees.
- Stihl MS 271 (Farm Boss) or larger for bigger timber.
    - I use a MS 441 which can take almost any tree but is larger than necessary for most habitat work.
- Protective gear is a must… chaps, helmet with hearing protection and eye protection.
    - Please choose safety. It's just not worth it otherwise. Even if it's not for you… it's for them.
- Tool belt for 2-3# hammer with wedge sleeve, 2 small and 2 large wedges. Wedges greatly improve ease and safety in cutting.
- Habitat Hook - www.nationscreations.net
    - Perfect tool to aid in providing leverage for hinge cutting (pic at right)





A tremendous amount of work can be done with a small chainsaw, tank of gas, bucket of hand saws and small tools. Tool belt with wedges below.



Budget Minded Food Plot Equipment:

- Food plots can be put in with a $40 backpack sprayer and a rake or a $50,000 tractor with a yard full of implements.
    - I give the following recommendations when budget conscious, as it has proven effective for me as many of the items are used only a few times each season.
- ATV - I have graduated from rakes to lawn tractors to a basic ATV.
    - Outfitted with a large cargo box greatly improves access to the land and reduces time and energy involved in moving tools and materials.
- ATV sprayer with 12’ boom or boomless of similar width provides good coverage.
    - I have a 25 gal Fimco 12’ boom sprayer - $400.
    - I can spray 3 acres in about 1 hour.
- Bag seeder for broadcasting. Earthway 2750 costs about $45 and is great for all seeds and fertilizers, see below.
- I use a small ATV disk for tillage. King Kutter 33”, about $700.
- Cultipackers are not often talked about but they are critical to food plot installation.
    - You can buy them for $1000. I made one for about $100.

Earthway Bag Spreader





ATV – Note boom sprayer and large front mounted cargo box that can hold any tools needed when working on the land.



33” disc King Kutter ATV disc with concrete filled weight on top for added down pressure

DIY $100 cultipacker – concrete filled culvert pipe and steel pipe axle, it is only used a few days a year and gets the job done very well. 52” and 450#





Example of a manufactured cultipacker. 48” and 330#.



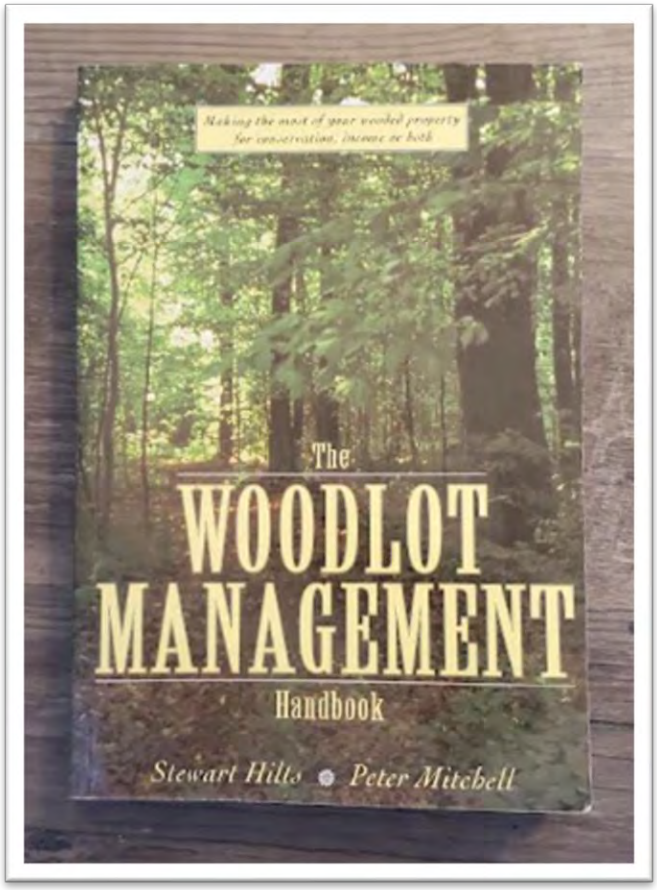
A 24-30” walk behind brush mower is extremely versatile. It can mow most roadways in 3-4 passes and is perfect for corridors in one pass. Consider quality and horsepower. This is my DR 30” 22 HP brush mower. It can easily handle tall grass and small brush up to 3”. We even mow down 4 acres of 6’+ tall switchgrass annually. This mower takes it on easily.



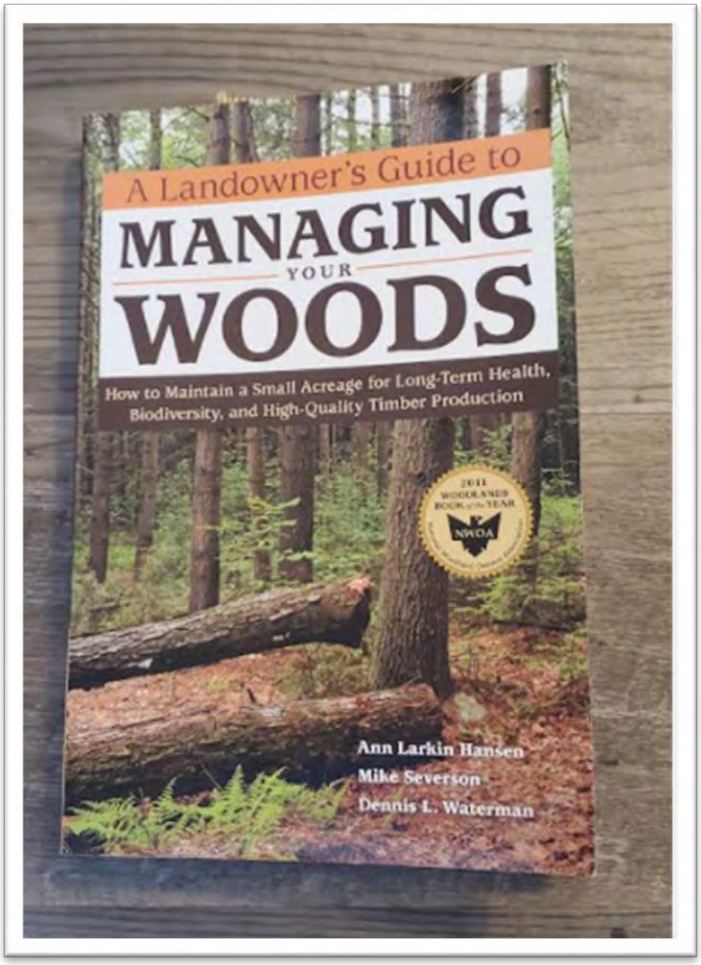
Drones make a fantastic tool for planning your property and documenting the improvements over time. Having the perspective from the air will help you in seeing geometry of open field designs as well as scouting in the winter. Drones have come a long way in recent years and are now reasonably priced and simple to operate. It is also a fun way to involve kids on the property. My drone is a DJI Mavic Mini and is just under $400.

Recommended Reading:

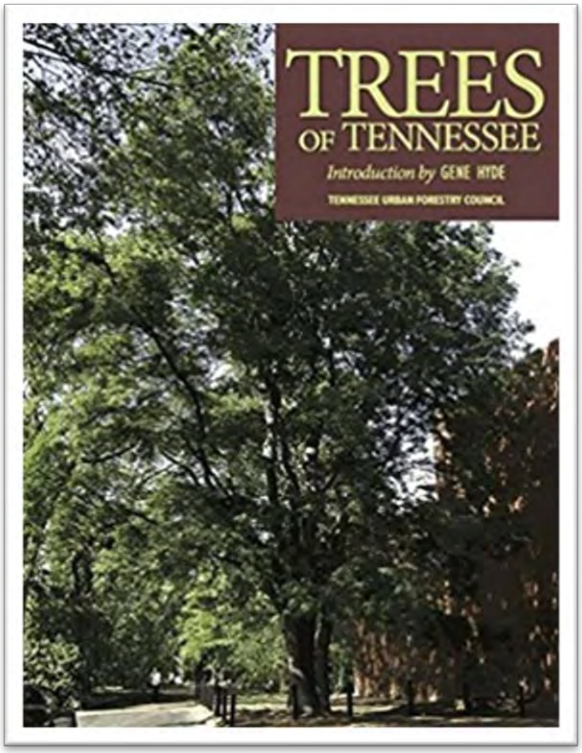
Books reinforce learning far greater than videos or google searches. Here are some great titles that have been helpful to me along the way.



"Woodlot Management" and "Managing Your Woods" – learn about your timber and different styles of management.

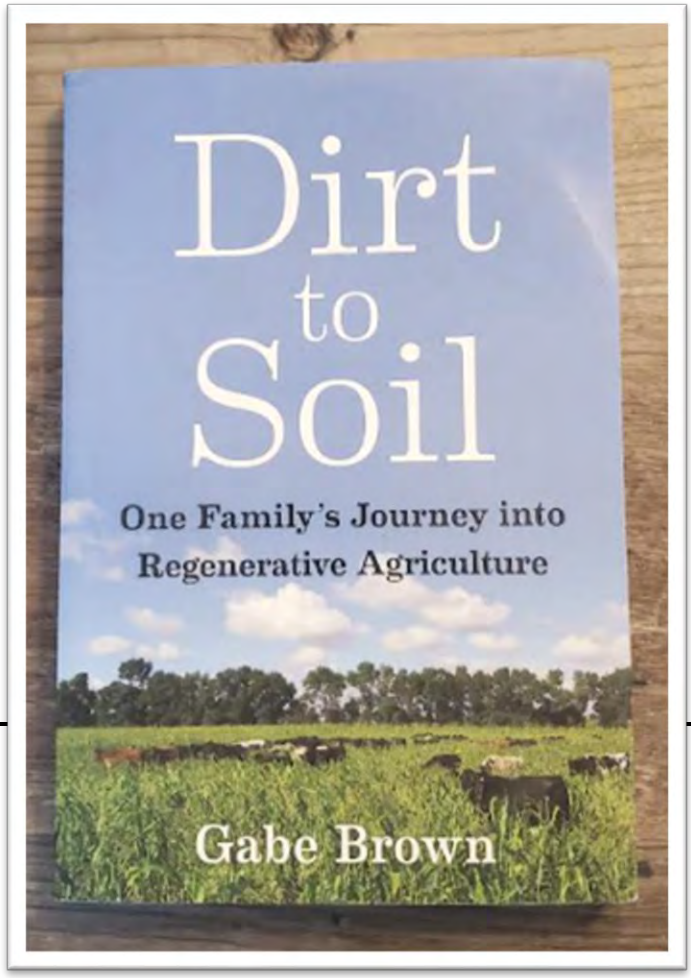


Though not geared to whitetails, these books help you know enough about various timber management approaches to incorporate into your plans for whitetails and wildlife as well as make good decisions for the health of your woods and economic benefit if you choose to harvest.



Knowing your tree species is great first step to managing your timber properly. This (or any similar guide for your state) is the perfect companion to help you ID your trees and know basic facts like preferred soil, sun, moisture, etc. for growing conditions.

“Dirt to Soil” gives insight into regenerative agriculture, better known as no-till applications. While I still use both on my farm, more and more operations are going to no-till for benefits of soil health, moisture, reduced inputs and quality of forage to attract whitetails.



cTrail Camera Strategy and Tips:



Cameras are the best scouting tool we have, but should be used carefully or they will hurt more than help. Here are some camera related tips to help you in your hunting:

- I recommend Browning Cameras. There are other good ones, but I've just had good luck with them – Excellent durability and battery life and good pictures without too many blanks.
    - Any black/no-flash version is a good one. I do not recommend infrared cameras by any brand as they spook deer.
    - For cell cams, the Browning Ridgeline is a great option (shown above) as it has choice of two cell providers, black/no-flash and excellent battery life
    - I like to purchase cameras from www.trailcampro.com as they have great info on testing, competitive pricing and excellent service. Just call them and start asking questions. You'll agree!
    - For cell cams, use lithium batteries. They drain alkaline batteries quickly.
- Put cameras out in summer, but recognize that bucks like different habitat in the summer than in hunting season. However, it is good to see what is in the area, focus on larger, open areas and expect to see more activity at night in these locations.
- Move cameras from field edges to mock scrapes and waterholes in August.
- Place cameras high on tree (6' plus)
- Put in fresh batteries around Labor Day, this is also your last trip into the timber before hunting.
- Every mock scrape should have a camera
- Best spots (waterholes with mock scrapes) are good locations for cell cameras
- Where you have a waterhole/mock scrape combo, make sure the camera is placed such that it can take a picture of both in the same shot.
- Only pull SD cards when hunting a location, it isn't worth the invasion to get the cards otherwise.
    - If you can't stay away, then buy cell cams

- Cell cams are great choices for:
  - Areas you cannot easily get to or can't risk the entry
  - Properties far from home (save the time and miles)
  - Immediate information
  - BEST cell cam reason – hunter education. Every time you see activity, ask yourself, "why is this deer here?" Note the time of year, weather, temperature and other relevant conditions. Then look for when these conditions will be present again and go hunting!

SD card failure is not an option – protect them! Have quality waterproof and impact protective cases. I carry one large one in the off-season and have a small one for hunting season.





My 2021 buck was caught working mock scrapes by a cell cam just minutes before he was shot further down the same corridor.

Hunting the Seasons and the Weather:

Whole books have been written on how to hunt whitetails depending on the season and the weather. With a well-planned property setup for hunting mature whitetails, here are some highlights to consider.

- By choosing the best days, and you will hunt less yet be more successful.
  - Hunter pressure on the land reduces mature buck activity. Even if you don't see them, they know you have been there and may change their activity.
  - You increase your odds by preserving the best stands for the best days.
  - Don't be tied to your 'favorite' spots, always be considering where else you can go to spread out the impact.
  - Hunt other properties or public land to keep the pressure off yours
  - Have observation stands to enjoy and learn about your property without taking the risk of educating deer of your presence.
  - Scent control should not be taken lightly. It's your last line of defense.

- **Hunting the Seasons (based on Tennessee):**
  - Early season (Mid-September through Oct 1):
    - Summer patterns may exist, bedding to food pattern may be good to hunt.
    - Only evening hunts, not morning yet.
    - Great time to harvest does – get the disturbance done before the heart of the season hits
  - Mid-Late October:
    - Patterns changing, not yet rut activity, but bucks will be relocating to their fall ranges and bedding.
    - Quality evening food sources, particularly kill plots could be great. Hot weather, hit the waterholes.
  - Later October/Early Nov:
    - This is "pre-rut". Bucks increase their signing (scrapes, licking branches, rubs, etc.) during this time. Know what your bucks are doing and be there.
    - This is particularly true year-to-year. If you have a local buck that was busy on scrapes the last few days of October last year, it is VERY LIKELY he will be there this year as well.
    - This will be when morning hunts start to be productive, particularly the First week of Nov.

- Mid-Late November
    - Bucks will be on their feet much of the time to find the next doe ready to breed.
    - Time in the woods in likely travel locations is key. This is one time that hours in the stand matter.
    - "Lock-Down", bucks tending to the last, final does in heat. A remote bedding location or travel pinch point can be great during this time.
- Thanksgiving through first week of December:
    - Thanksgiving Break is a super busy time of the hunting season. Be careful on marginal days. Don't pressure your herd if not optimum conditions. You may inherit a neighbor's buck due to pressure.
    - Resist the urge to kill a doe during this time unless you already have a buck on the ground.
- December – January
    - First 10 days of Dec could be the best time to harvest your shooter buck or your neighbors. Fewer receptive does equals a breakout of buck activity seeking the last few receptive does. They get very foolish during this timeframe. You will notice significant increase in daylight photos during this timeframe. Long hours in the stand are warranted.
    - January Late season hunting can still be promising. Focus on the evening hunts on food sources.
    - Late season is usually less busy in the woods and excellent hunts can be had with the advantage of a firearm over large, unimpacted food sources.

- **<u>Hunting the Weather:</u>**
    - Wind, Wind, Wind.
        - Anticipate which direction deer will come from. Don't sit in a stand that will blow your sent in that direction. If you get in a stand and with wind changes such that your scent is going somewhere you do not want, then leave.
        - Steady wind is your friend. Gusts or changing wind can make swirling which sends your scent in unpredictable locations.
        - Shift in the wind can be good, encouraging movement.
    - Too still = no hunt. Deer don't like to move as much when it is very still. Also, it's harder for you to sneak in without being heard.
    - Thermals, generally speaking:
        - Morning thermals (air warming) go up a hillside.
        - Evening thermals (air cooling) go down a hillside.

- Hunt cold fronts, before and after:
    - Before: Changing wind directions and pressure falling – deer move to feed before storms.
    - After: Stabilizing weather, with a temperature drop OFTEN increases deer travel and daylight activity in general.
    - The longer or more severe the weather event during the cold front pushing through, the better the next few days will be. For example, a 15 degree temp drop is good, a 30 degree temp drop is huge!
- Don't hunt stable conditions (three days of the same weather)
- Windy weather? Look for stands in lower locations, out of wind.
- Rainy weather? Deer still move, particularly as it lightens up.
    - Consider going out in the rain, getting in a tree (helps greatly with scent) and then waiting for the clearing to come. Then deer move.
    - Hunt gaps in the rain… will there be 2 hours between storms? Be in a tree.
- Snow? Hunt food and trails leading to food.
- Hot weather (this could be any season that is 15+ degrees above average)
    - Waterholes, deer will be thirsty
    - Soft mast (apples and fruit)
- Other:
    - Stay on hunter access routes at all cost.
    - Only retrieve deer after dark. Go get it with a ATV, no voices, pickup, bring back and take pictures, gut, etc. back at the house/cabin/access point. Whoever retrieves the deer should be scent free and careful of leaving any sign or scent.

Habitat Pictures from Our Properties





Bedding area detail work. Groomed 1-2' trails down to dirt with all debris removed. Careful attention to preserving hinge cut trees while still creating a maze-like feel. Within each 1/4-1/3 acre bedding area is about 300' of trails throughout. Back logs are nice, but not needed. Security, side cover, browse and many escape routes are critical components.

Travel corridor after cutting, note the trees hinge cut perpendicular to the direction of travel. The trail has been worn to the dirt.



Travel corridor in winter and spring, it is apparent deer are using this route exclusively where previously there were several trails that filtered through this area.







A quality hinge cut will not be more than 2/3 of the way through the tree. This keeps a good portion of the cambium layer intact and will keep the tree alive for many years to come. Leverage to push or pull the trees down is important – see tools, habitat hook.



Different trees will hinge to various heights. Practice and note how each tree will cut. Also consider the application to determine height – low to block and screen, higher to screen but allow deer to walk under.

Planting Switchgrass

Switchgrass is great security cover and can also provide a soft edge to food plots, but before you go out to seed the switch you must first prepare the site. Switchgrass can be finicky and does not do well with any competition. The planting location needs to be prepped prior to planting switchgrass.

Planting Site

Frost Seeding

If you plan to frost seed your switchgrass, you will need to prepare the site the summer / fall prior to seeding. Two applications of glyphosate and 2-4D will kill most of the weed competition and bring you into spring with bare soil. If you planted an annual crop in this location (corn, soybeans, etc), you can also frost seed into last years annual plot.

Kill / Till

If you did not plan ahead or simply want to plant using a different method, the kill / till approach is another great way to plant switchgrass. A weed free / prepared seed bed is still needed except with the kill / till method you don't need to spray the previous year. Spray in mid-May, wait for the vegetation to die and yellow, till that in and then pack the dirt. Wait for the next round of vegetation to grow, spray once more, till that in and then pack the dirt. This second spraying will be around early / mid-June and will bring you right into seeding.

Planting Time

Frost Seeding

When frost seeding, you are trying to take advantage of nature's way of seeding, during the freeze / thaw cycle that takes place every year during late winter or early spring. Timing will vary by location. An inch of snow is ideal but rare in the south. Appropriate time to frost seed, sometimes seeding with a little snow is helpful as you can see your coverage. As the snow melts the seeds will be pulled into the tiny cracks in ground that are created during the freeze / thaw cycle.

Kill / Till

When planting using the kill / till method, you are essentially seeding the conventional way. After spraying the second time (likely in early June), and working the ground about a week later then packing it down, seed onto the freshly packed ground and then it is very important to pack the dirt once more to ensure good seed to soil contact. The seeds will geminate with very little competition. Time seeding with a rain event.

- Frost seeding switchgrass in early March is a cost effective means to place seed without the need for heavy equipment.







5-day old switchgrass in early June (above). Preparation and patience is king with switchgrass. Weed free soil and properly timed sprayings are critical to success. Mature switchgrass (right) can easily be 6 ft tall and will stand up tall throughout the fall.

Bare root trees are awesome! At only a few dollars each, these 3'+ Norway spruce trees are one of my favorites. Inexpensive and quickly planted. These trees are fast growing and the deer generally leave them alone in mild winters, but bud capping is recommended until they are out of reach.





Bare root poplars, willows and other varieties are a great way to get timber growing fast. Putting on several feet each year, you can regenerate an open area just a few years with plantings like these.

Annual planted plot screen is a fantastic option – easy to plant, inexpensive and very effective for stealth access.



As soon as soil temperatures climb into the 50's (later May), plot screen seed can be put out.

A finished seed bed is sprayed with simazine, a pre-emergent to prevent weed growth during the germination and early growth stage of the plot screen. Ideally a heavy rain will follow, which is typical in late May and early June.

Plot screen grows aggressively, but is a nitrogen pig. Applications of 46-0-0 (urea) in July and August are recommended to help the screen grow. (Screen is already 5+ feet tall in mid-late July).



When it is finished growing, annual plot screen can be well over 12’ tall. It can be fragile to wind though. To prevent wind damage, strips should not be less than 20’ wide. Also, as always, follow seeding rates. It is very easy to overdo it and put out too much seed. This will stunt the plant and stems will not fully develop. The first heavy wind you have in October (once it is dry) will put it all on the ground! Another caution is to wait until mid-June for seeding. While the tall screen is fun to grow, it is better to have it be a little shorter as it will tolerate the wind and snow better.



Planting Miscanthus

Planting Site

(4 month old miscanthus pictured below)

You are planting rhizomes, much like bulbs. Choose a planting location that receives 4-6 hours of sunlight for maximum height. Miscanthus will grow in a variety of soil types, however if you have sandy soil, incorporate compost or peat. If you have heavy clay, add sand for drainage. If planting in the fall, mixing in sand is important to help prevent rot during the wet winter months. The roots can rot where there is too much moisture, do not plant in areas where water stands for more than a week during spring thaws or in swamps.



Planting Time

Mid spring is a preferred time to plant. Timing is important, you want to have good moisture in the ground but not when the soil is soggy or if it's below 50 degrees. Too much moisture is deadly for the rhizomes. Planting date will vary based on location, but here in Southwest Michigan, I typically plant in late March / early April.

Planting

Removing competing vegetation is critical. Treat the planting location with herbicide or manually remove the grasses / broadleaf weeds. Loosen up the ground around 1 foot deep by 1 foot wide to give the roots room to expand. If you can tell where last years stems were, place the rhizome in the ground with the stems facing upward. If you cannot tell, that is also fine, the rhizomes will find their way to the surface. Once in the ground, cover with at least 2" of soil, covering anywhere from 2-6" is fine. It just needs to be covered to be away from the drier soil surface. Mulching will help keep the weeds at bay as well as keep moisture in the ground.

Buckwheat provides an excellent no-till option for brassica and tillage radish plantings. It begins with spraying to kill existing vegetation and applying 100#/acre of buckwheat seed in mid-June with a target 6-8 weeks of growing.

If following the rotation of grains/brassica on food plots, you will have winter rye to seed the buckwheat into, and then crush it with the cultipacker.

The picture at right shows buckwheat at about 2 weeks after seeding. It then grows vigorously throughout July to heights of 3-4' or more, suppressing weeds.

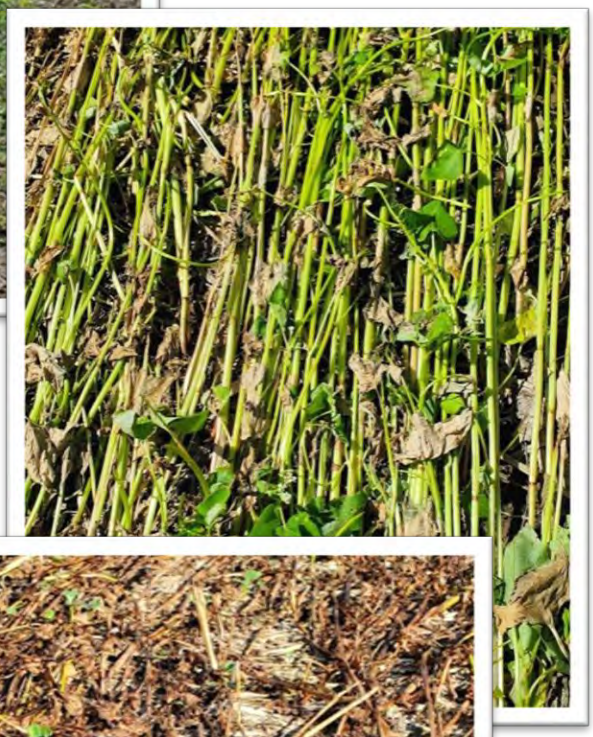




In late July or early August and just before a good rain (rain is more important that date) broadcast the brassica and tillage radish seed into the standing buckwheat along with appropriate fertilizers.



Once the seed and fertilizer is out, the buckwheat can be rolled down with a roller or cultipacker. One pass is all that is needed as the buckwheat lays down very easily.



The result is a thick straw-like mat of organic material to shade the small brassica and tillage radish seeds. This lowers soil temperatures and drastically increases moisture retention providing an excellent environment for seed germination. A quick spray of glyphosate is recommended to ensure termination.



The buckwheat breaks down quickly as the brassicas and tillage radish emerge.

Conventional tillage with disc and drag for larger seeds like peas, beans, corn and plot screen. Though I continue to do more with no-till practices, this is a sound way to plot.

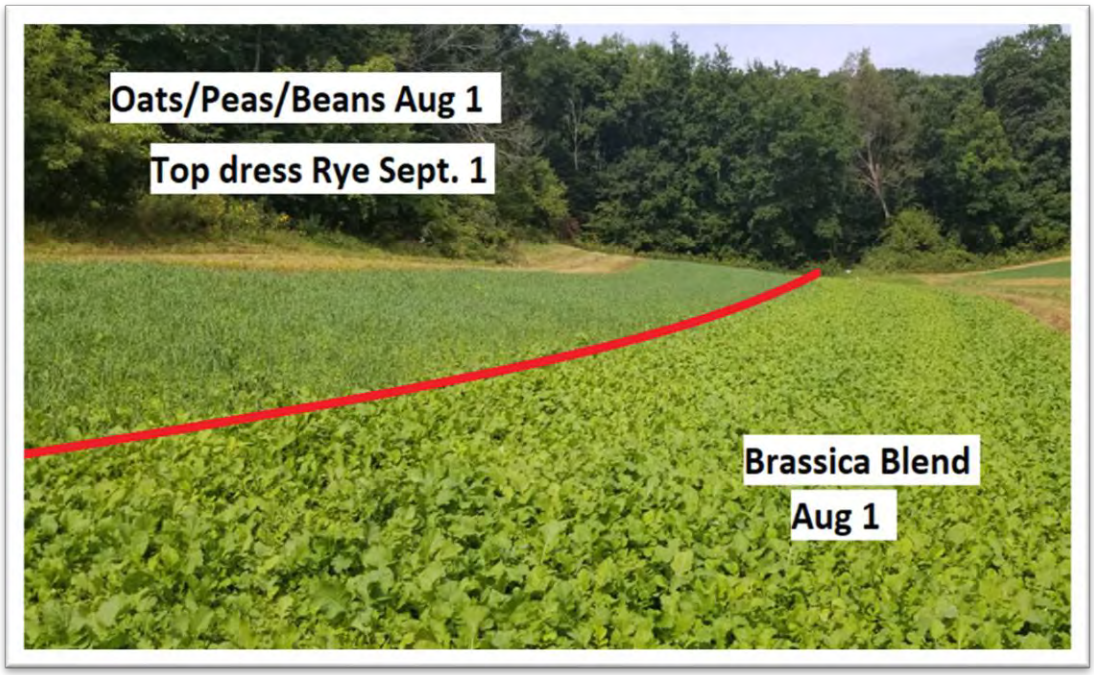






A cultipacker is essential to ensure proper seed bed, moisture retention and increase germination. Here is a finished plot; tilled, dragged, seeded, dragged again and finally cultipacked on the right, and the no-till brassica into buckwheat on the left.

Typical fall food source setup, split lengthwise. This field is a 1.5 acres, split down the middle.





Top dressing oats/peas/bean plots with cereal rye on Labor Day weekend gives a great lush-green base as the oats/peas/beans reach maturity.

Beware of plots with slopes – erosion can be significant, even one heavy rainfall can rob you of your soil. This picture is of one of my fields in 2021, and another factor pushing me to do more no-till rotations.





Long “Strip Plots” are a frequent design element in whitetail property designs. They facilitate deer movement across open fields to bring deer in range of blinds and connect timber corridors. Plots are typically 10-15 yards wide with switchgrass on either side for cover and comfort for deer travel.



Brassica greens are great forage in early, and the bulbs are hammered through late season – even with snow cover – making this a powerful attraction much of the hunting season.

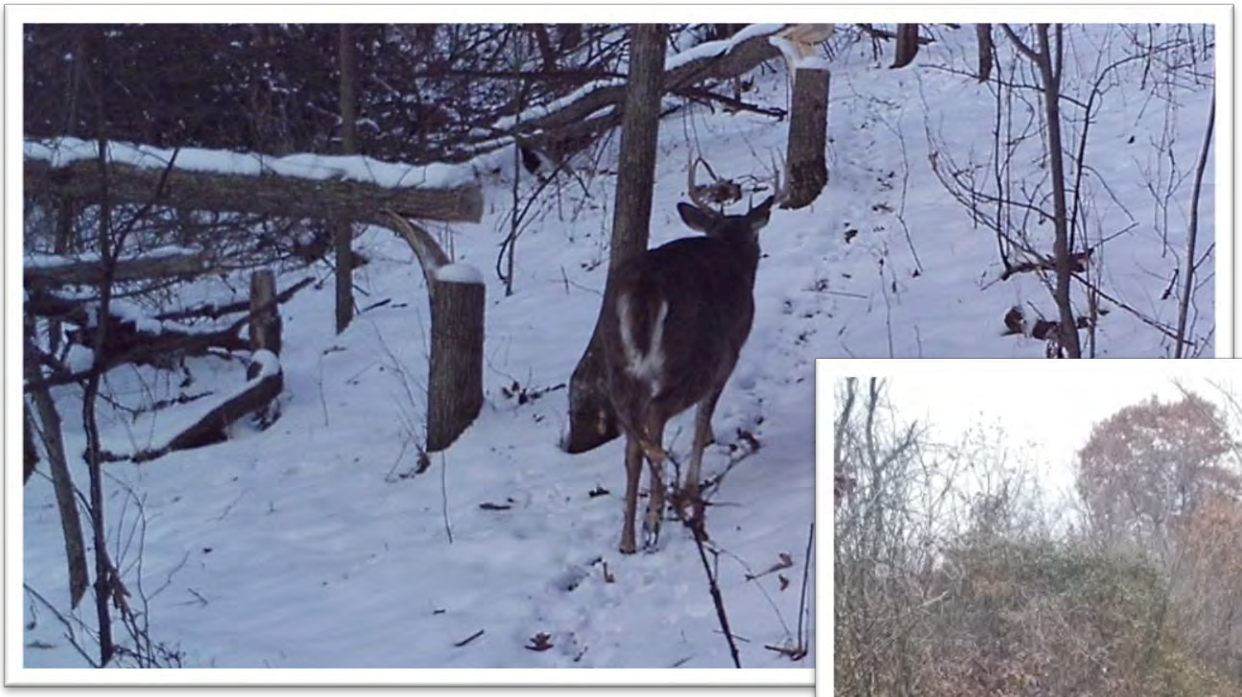


Off-grid water solution: Gutter to tank to buckets or connect a hose for filling sprayer tanks. Even with a small roof area can accumulate a lot of water.





Apple trees - Generously wide 5’ tall fencing with 3 T-posts is a must or your apple trees will be eaten before they produce. Also, metal screen around the base to prevent girdling by mice, and some mulch to retain moisture and promote root growth.



(ABOVE) Travel corridor with hinge cut trees perpendicular to the route of travel. This was in a location where there were three trails that all handled the same movement. By defining one route and blocking others, the movement became defined. Trees hinge cut at knee to hip level provide good blockage to define travel, and also provide side cover and browse. This trail cam pic was taken 5 days after cutting was made!



(RIGHT) Travel corridor through an old field of briars, regenerating poplars, oaks and other thick vegetation. This picture was taken in the fall following installation. The 2-3' path was worn to the dirt! Note the winding route of this path, avoiding straight lines is more natural.



Quality blinds are an important factor to the enjoyment and success of the hunt. One common mistake landowners make is putting a higher amount of resources into buildings and land management equipment and not into hunting equipment, clothing, stands and blinds. This Shadow Hunter brand blind is located on an edge of one of our food plots. It is easy to install and provides superior safety and comfort for all seasons.

My go-to tree stand is the Millennium M150 for the superior light weight (aluminum) construction, ease of installation, quiet function and comfort. They also make excellent single and double ladder stands. I can also offer these at a discount with manufacturer direct purchasing, please ask if you are interested.



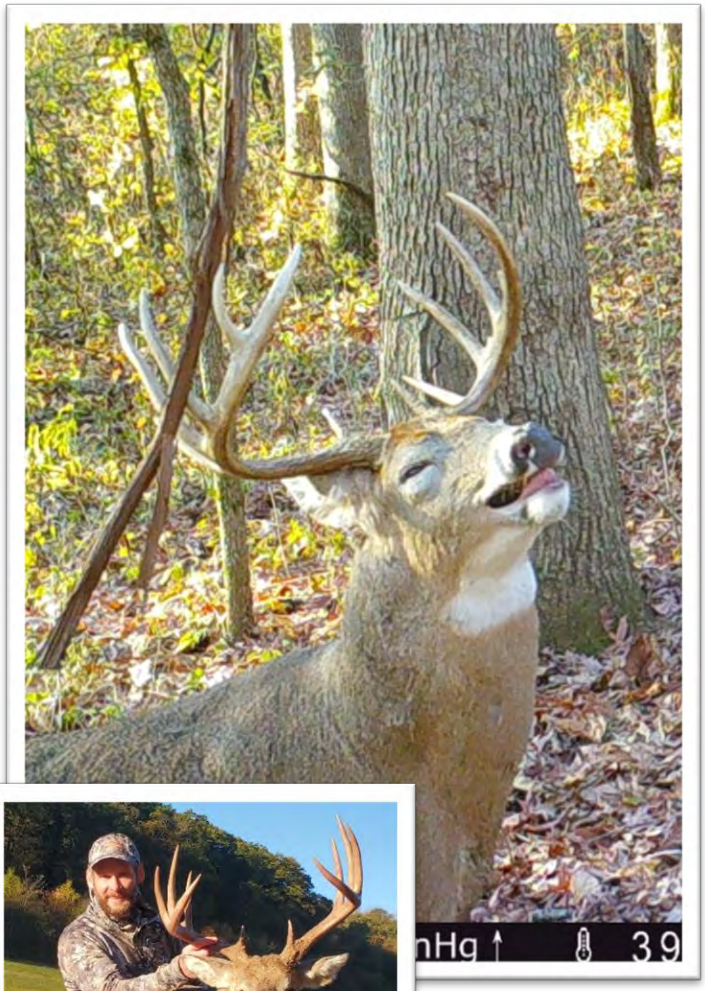


Blinds should only be as high as needed for hunting. It is very infrequent that a tall “tower” blind setup is necessary.

The blind pictured to the left is in one of our main food plots, in May when Egyptian wheat was planted in June and switchgrass is only knee high.



The picture on the right is the same blind about mid-August, looking back from the plot. The switchgrass is then about 5 ft tall and Egyptian wheat 10’+. This setup provides deer-free access from the backside of the blind and a killer setup for hunting.



Grapevine mock scrape. This one is on paracord between two trees so it could be positioned exactly next to the travel route. This spot is a 25 yard shot from the treestand. The buck pictured was closely tracked in 2020 (as seen in pic) and was eventually harvested in 2021 as a five year-old (inset picture).

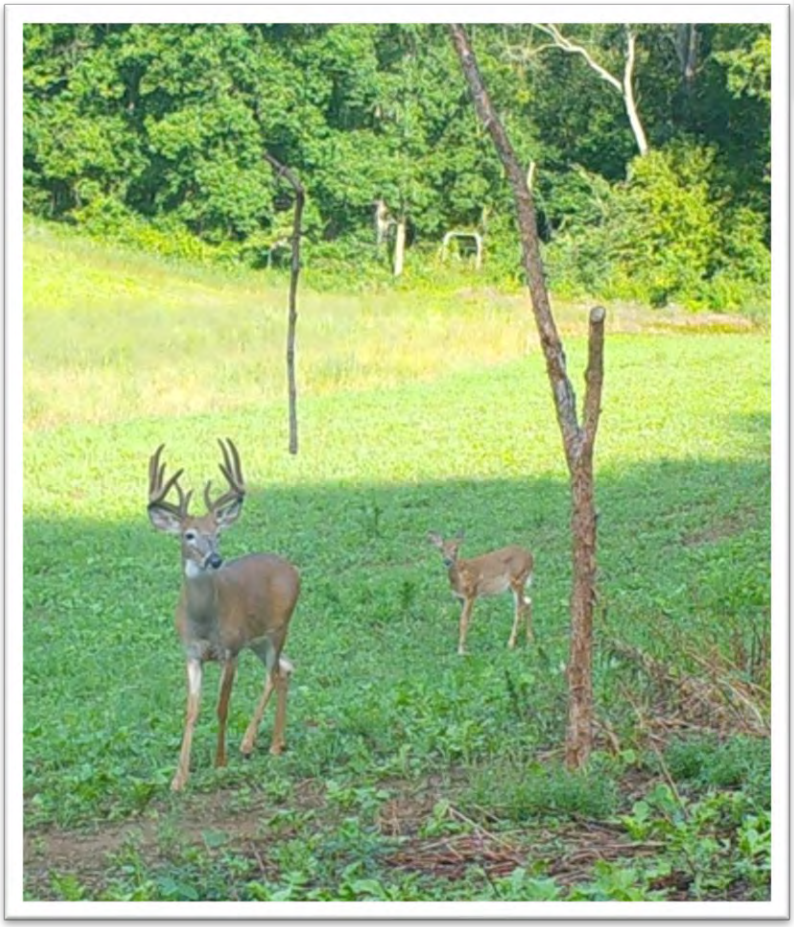


New waterhole installation (before rain filled it in). Keeping the top of the tank buried a few inches below the surrounding surface will aid in keeping it filled. (Notice the tree stand just over my shoulder)

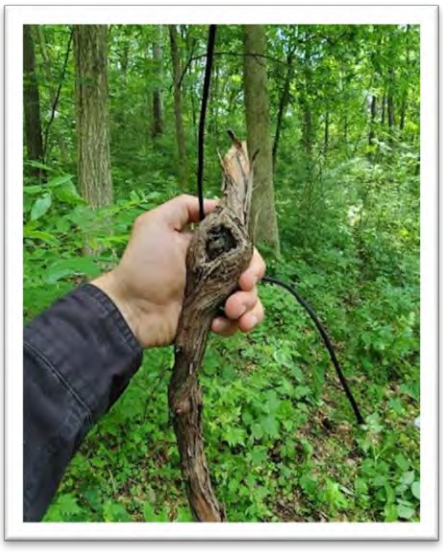
Thumbs up for this DEER MAGNET!

With soil sloped down toward the waterhole and some clover seed tossed for quick erosion control, these quickly fill and look just like a puddle in the woods.





In open plot areas, a licking branch and mock scrape setup can be made with a ‘borrowed’ tree and suspended vine, all positioned about 25-30 yards from the blind. 3/4” – 1” vines, with a knot or elbow to tie the rope off are perfect!



The only thing better than a mock scrape or a waterhole is a mock scrape **AND** a waterhole. This vine mock scrape and waterhole on a travel corridor between bedding and food is a dynamite location. The stand is behind the camera, 22 yards from the buck.





Any day I can be working on whitetail habitat is a good day. I have been blessed to have countless days working with friends and family to improve our land for hunting.

Please let me know how I can help you build your whitetail property!