

## 2015 ANNUAL WHITE-TAILED DEER HUNT PROGRAM

### National Conservation Training Center

This plan is an annual step-down plan from the National Conservation Training Center (NCTC) White-tailed Deer Management Environmental Assessment and the NCTC White-tailed Deer Hunt Management Plan (2003). This plan covers the period from July 1, 2015 to June 30, 2016, which coincides with the time frame of West Virginia (WV) Hunting regulations. The purpose of this plan is to define the purpose, guidelines and regulations for managed hunting and any other deer population control measures planned for this time period.

#### Purpose

The purpose of the hunt at the NCTC is to reduce then stabilize the local deer herd, reduce impacts on native vegetation and dependent wildlife, to reduce the threat of local deer-vehicle encounters, to reduce depredation by deer on landscape and habitat restoration plantings, and to provide a wildlife-dependent recreational activity for the public. The NCTC can provide leadership in the implementation of safe and effective controlled access hunts to address neighborhood concerns about a burgeoning local deer population. The NCTC program will have a strong educational component that is consistent with the center's mission. Ideally, the NCTC program will become a model for implementing controlled hunting programs to address issues of deer herd management in human dominated landscapes.

#### Deer Population Estimates and Goals

An excessive deer population has a negative impact on the vegetation, which affects all other biota in the area. While the appropriate number of deer in an area is dependent on the habitat and cultural considerations, a commonly-used figure is 10-20 deer per square mile (640 acres) in forested areas; 80 deer per square mile is deemed to be an extremely high population. NCTC, at about 532 acres, is almost one square mile, and while not entirely forested, there are no crop fields or similar food source that would increase the carrying capacity much above the 20 per square mile figure. Since does usually have 2 fawns per year, deer populations can grow rapidly if unchecked.

The criteria used to determine an appropriate number of deer includes such metrics as the annual spotlight survey count and the number of deer harvested in the managed hunt, which are valuable in detecting trends from year to year as well as the actual number of deer present. Other important considerations include direct observation of number of deer present, deer health and reproduction, available food sources, and damage to vegetation and the degree of vegetation recovery and regeneration. While some of these observations may be made in summer or early fall, some are not noticeable or available until late fall or winter. The target number of deer to harvest will be determined following the spotlight survey (early to mid November), taking all of the above factors into consideration, and modified as further information and harvest results become available.

#### Safety Considerations

Since safety is the most important consideration, a number of practices are employed to help minimize the potential for injury or property damage. Hunting will only take place when NCTC is not holding classes or meetings. Most hunting will take place on Saturdays, with one weekday hunt after Christmas when the site is closed for business.

Stands, provided by NCTC, are to be used for all firearms hunting. These are carefully located and have designated shooting zones to minimize possibility of an errant shot.

In order to further minimize risk, no regular breech-loading rifles will be used. Instead NCTC requires that shotguns with rifled slugs or sabot slugs be used, as well as archery and muzzleloader rifles during designated dates. In order to reduce hazard to wildlife lead free ammunition is required.

All hunters must show certification of completion of a WV sanctioned hunter safety education program. All hunters must take an online orientation and safety program and pass a test each year prior to applying for the hunt. All youths under 15 must be accompanied by an adult hunter. All hunters must stay in their designated area unless accompanied by an NCTC staff member.

The use of blaze orange clothing is required except during one archery-only hunt dates. The use of safety harness is required in any elevated stand. Hunters must check in and out. NCTC staff will be on hand to monitor hunter activity and safety compliance and to render any assistance needed.

#### Resource Protection Considerations

Only deer may be hunted. In order to have the greatest effect on herd reduction, the taking of antlerless deer is encouraged, and a hunter must take an antlerless deer before taking an antlered deer. Five of the planned hunting dates only allow the taking of antlerless deer by WV regulations.

There is an eagle nest that has been used for the last several years. The typical time for eagle nesting is after the dates planned for hunting.

With the possible exception of accommodation for hunters with disabilities, no hunter vehicles are allowed off road.

#### Archery Hunting

Archery-only hunting will take place in conjunction with shotgun and muzzleloader hunting, by using archery hunting in and near the main campus area on hunt days when there are no guests in residence or attending meetings or classes.

#### Shotgun and Muzzleloader Hunting

White-tailed deer hunting by means of shotgun and muzzleloader rifle will be held in the same manner as in previous years during the seasons permitted by WV regulations.

#### Professional Removal/Sharpshooting

The primary method used to control the deer population at NCTC during the last nine years has been a managed recreational hunt focused primarily on antlerless deer during the regular hunting season. While beneficial, this hunt has not always been harvesting enough deer to achieve a population level in balance with the available habitat. The number of hunting dates and hunting stands has been increased at NCTC over the last several years to try to increase the number of deer harvested, with slight improvement. Recreational hunting is the preferred method of deer population management at NCTC. However, as a last resort, if circumstances warrant (e.g., high deer population, low harvest rate, degrading habitat conditions) the use of sharpshooters or similar means of removal will be utilized. This would be dependent upon a special permit from WV Dept. of Natural Resources.

This method was employed in January 2009, when, after considering various possibilities it was determined the best option for addressing the immediate problem was to use skilled marksmen to remove antlerless deer from the herd. Volunteer sharpshooters from Farmers and Hunters Feeding the Hungry (FHFH), a well-regarded non-profit organization, carried out the operation and provided the venison to local food banks and homeless shelters.

Appendix: National Conservation Training Center - Deer Hunting Requirements 2015