



Proceedings

Michigan Society of American Foresters
"Forest & Wildlife-Striving for Balance"

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Frawley, Brian J. 2005. Michigan Deer Harvest Survey Report: 2004 Seasons. Michigan Department of Natural Resources, Wildlife Division Report No. 3444. 39 pp.

Frawley, Brian J. 2004. Demographics, Recruitment, and Retention of Michigan Hunters. Michigan Department of Natural Resources, Wildlife Division Report No. 3426. 39 pp.

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Randall, Jesse A. and Michael B. Walters. 2005 [draft]. Deer and Sedge Impact Tree Regeneration in Working Forests: Possible Restoration Treatments. Michigan State Bulletin E-xxxx. 3 pp.

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Forward

This conference, the first on the subject of forests and deer held in Michigan by the SAF, has long been needed. The issues that led to this conference have been debated for decades, not only in Michigan, but across the Lake States, eastern North America, and in many countries around the world. The topic of forest impacts by deer is highly charged and includes many socio-political-cultural aspects. While presentations during this conference primarily focused on research-based information on deer impacts and management/policy alternatives, the Michigan SAF fully recognizes that public attitudes and perceptions have ruled the day and will likely continue to do so for some time. There is little argument over the concept that deer have had, and will continue to have, tremendous impacts on the forest resources of Michigan. However, the level and kind of impacts; and what should and could be done from a management standpoint is highly controversial.

This conference touched on many facets surrounding deer “overabundance” and resource impacts. However, a comprehensive review of all facets would have taken more days than were available. Everyone is encouraged to learn more from the wealth of available literature. The research bank steadily grows, especially as technological advances allow researchers to better address some of the ecosystem and temporal themes. Speaker papers provide references for further study. An annotated bibliography cites many of the commonly referenced papers. Resource managers and other interested individuals are encouraged to use these and other information resources to learn more about white-tailed deer and their ecological, social, and economic impacts.

The original framework was to include three sessions; 1) forest impacts of white-tailed deer, 2) attempts to manage or deal with overabundant populations, and 3) a look to the future of what could and should be done. However, due to the nature of some presentation topics, it became apparent that elements of all three session ideas were best included within individual presentations. The negative impacts of deer in forested landscapes (as well as other landscapes) have been well-documented over the past few decades. There remain, of course, many avenues for additional research. While it may be easiest to focus on ecological impacts, the conference planners hope that participants will come away with a forward-looking perspective and consider what might be needed to work towards securing a sustainable and healthy set of natural resources.

Gary Alt keynoted the conference, bringing with him pioneering experience from the Pennsylvania Game Commission. Pennsylvania may be the state with the greatest and longest-running controversy over deer. Brent Rudolph set the stage by describing deer management in Michigan, a critical topic before impacts and alternative solutions could be discussed. Joseph LeBouton, Jean-Pierre Tremblay, and Dave Flaspohler focused on impacts of deer herbivory. Ben Peyton and Peter Bull reminded us about the critical role that hunters play. Tom Ward, Susan Stout, and Jesse Randall addressed management opportunities in light of high deer densities.

Gary Donovan and Dave deCalesta reviewed deer factors in forest certification, a crucial current topic in Michigan. State lands undergo field audits in September, 2005 and nearly two million acres of industrial land are currently enrolled in certification programs. With forest regeneration as one of the requirements, the ability of forest owners and managers to regenerate not only commercial tree species, but the entire complex of forest flora is challenged by deer herbivory.

Dave deCalesta and Bill Moritz postulated on possible deer management strategies. Finally, Gary Alt closed the conference by sharing insight into the pressures and possibilities of working towards an ecosystem-based approach to forest and deer management.

The geographic focus of this conference was primarily Michigan. However, Michigan has considerable commonality with all the upper Great Lakes States, as well as with other parts of North America. The conference planners attempted to highlight current research based in Michigan, and draw upon a larger body of research and case studies that help contextualize the issues of forests and deer.

The compact disk contains papers and PowerPoint slide presentations used by the conference speakers. In some cases, delivered presentations may be slightly different than the files on the



CD, due to last minute editing. Additional materials include short biographies of each speaker, abstracts of each presentation, and an annotated bibliography for those who might wish to pursue a literature search. Lastly, there is a table of contents, the conference agenda, and other documents related to the conference.

In his essay on wilderness, Aldo Leopold described the phenomenon of deer overpopulation on the forest floor. "The effect of too many deer on the ground flora of the forest deserves special mention because it is an elusive burglary of esthetic wealth, the more dangerous because unintentional and unseen. One is put in mind of Shakespeare's warning that 'virtue, grown to pleurisy, dies of its own too much.' Be this as it may, the forest landscape is deprived of a certain exuberance which arises from a rich variety of plants fighting each other for a place in the sun."

Acknowledgements

Jim Ferris, as the Chair of the Upper Peninsula Chapter of the Michigan Society of American Foresters (SAF), guided the planning process for this conference. Bill Cook and Dean Wilson spearheaded the program team and logistics team, respectively. Chris Burnett, Bob Heyd, Don Howlett, and Jack Penegor also served on the planning team. Mark Bale, as always, competently handled the registration records. Ingrid Klotz and the resources of the Michigan State University Upper Peninsula Tree Improvement Center were essential in the preparation of this conference. A host of other foresters helped with the many duties associated with the mechanics of holding this conference.

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