

Deer Herd Management on Magna Vista Plantation

Management of the white-tailed deer herd on Magna Vista is intensive and year-round, with the objective to produce trophy-class bucks and a herd density that is in balance with the available habitat. This goal is accomplished through herd monitoring and management, habitat management, and hunter management – all cornerstones of management for quality deer herds.

Herd monitoring and management on Magna Vista begins with an annual pre-season camera survey conducted in September. The objective of this survey is to provide information on deer density and sex ratios, and allow a projected doe and buck harvest to be developed annually. Likewise, individual bucks are identified through time and aged based on body characteristics, which allows the creation of a database detailing which bucks to target for harvest. The goal for buck harvest on Magna Vista is to harvest bucks that have reached their maximum antler potential, which occurs as bucks age beyond 4.5 years old and mature at 6.5 years old. Doe harvest is focused on harvesting mature does in order to reduce herd density and keep deer numbers in balance with the habitat. During 2017, the camera survey resulted in the identification of 168 individual bucks, with an estimated sex ratio of 1.3 bucks/doe. Moving forward, the goal will be to manage the herd with a sex ratio close to 1:1, recognizing the desirability of having a herd slightly skewed towards bucks when rutting activity begins.

Magna Vista is blessed with productive, alluvial soils capable of producing high quality deer herds. These soils produce plant communities high in crude protein with excellent palatability. However, like on any property, habitat management is critical to success of the deer management program on Magna Vista. Forest communities across the property have limited understory vegetation in areas, so timber management plans have been developed to conduct targeted forest harvesting operations that will increase available browse and bedding cover. Cool season food plots are planted in wheat, oats, turnips, and clovers, whereas agricultural plantings provide superb warm season forages designed to improve antler growth in bucks and body condition in lactating does. Browsing intensity on plots is closely monitored to assess deer use of plots, and browse surveys conducted during summer allow assessment of pressure on native forages critical to sustaining high quality deer herds.

Hunter management on Magna Vista is accomplished primarily through hunter education. Hunters are provided with an exhaustive list of bucks identified on the pre-season camera survey, with photographs of each individual buck from multiple angles. Hunters are asked to closely study photographs of individual bucks to ensure harvest of the appropriate animals. When photographs of bucks not identified on the survey are obtained, hunters are encouraged to request assistance aging them to minimize mistakes (harvest of younger bucks). In the future, hunters will be asked to collect deer observation data during hunts, which allows a consistent tool to monitor deer behavior at given stands, and under known weather conditions. These observations

provide a powerful tool that hunters can use to optimize success under a range of weather conditions and under variable prevailing winds.

Simply put, the ultimate goal for management of the deer herd on Magna Vista is to create premier hunting opportunities under an umbrella of land and herd management based on science. Magna Vista's management program, rich history, and location will ensure this goal, along with the desire amongst its members to create lasting memories, foster relationships among hunters, and appreciating the riches of the outdoors.

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