



In Minnesota, many of our properties and the surrounding landscapes have the ability to support robust white-tail deer populations. This is highly influenced by the types of vegetation, tree cover, and land-use.

White-tailed deer are adaptable creatures, found in woodlands, agricultural lands, rural areas, and even within urban backyards! However, they do have essential requirements of food, cover and water.

In our neck of the woods, deer are primarily found in... well... the woods!

Woodlands and forests often mean the same thing to most of us, but actually they describe two distinct natural communities. Forests are denser than woodlands and consist of multiple layers of trees in the canopy. Woodlands are bit more open, and have tree coverage with 30 to 80 percent closure in the canopy. Woodlands also have more diverse vegetation at the ground level, or understory. The increased sunlight reaching the ground encourages growth of vegetation that provides better food and cover for deer. Forest management practices that are usually used for timber production can also benefit deer populations.

Private land management for big white-tail deer!

Your land could produce trophy bucks!

With a little bit of direction, and a few intentional conservation practices, you can set your property on a trajectory to welcome white-tail deer for years to come.



Forest management for deer

In thick forests, any management activity that opens up the tree canopy and allows more sunlight in will encourage the growth of good deer forage. Timber harvests, tree thinning, prescribed burns, or the creation of woodland openings are all ways to create openings in a forest. In tandem with forest thinning, it is a good practice to also monitor or encourage the diversity of trees. No one tree can provide full-year forage for deer, so a good mix of species is important. Furthermore, it makes a healthier woodland.

Here are a few examples of native Minnesota trees and shrubs that really make deer happy!

- White Oak trees are a fan favorite of deer, the acorns are like sweet candy to them! The tree generally produces fruit every year.
- Red Oak, the second favorite tree of the Whitetail Deer. Red oak acorns are a fantastic late season food source. It should be noted, that red oak trees do not produce acorns every year.
- Northern Pin Oaks are similar in many ways to the Red Oak. They are a great option if your land has acidic soil as the tree thrives in it.
- White cedar trees provide safe winter cover. The closed canopies of cedar stands give deer protection from the deep snow, cold, and wind. These snow shelters and thermal protection is often preferred by deer over areas that contain abundant browse but little cover. Deer depend on the lower boughs of cedar trees for winter browse.
- Often overlooked, Hickory trees are great for deer. They love to nibble of the tree's buds and stems.
- Honeylocust trees can provide forage for deer in the spring (Young leaves) and also (Seed pods) later in the year.
- Hackberry trees give deer a good boost of protein in the spring.
- Staghorn sumac provides nice cover for deer, but also can supplement their diets at critical points in the year.
- Red Maples are helpful forage for deer in the harsh mid-winter months.
- **White-tail** also like to nip off the buds of a variety of native pine trees.





Clearing for forage and cover

Clearcut areas

Clearcutting a portion of forest can improve deer habitat.

Early successional vegetation describes habitat with vigorously growing grasses, forbs, shrubs and trees. These plants are excellent food and cover for deer but they need forest disturbance to get established. Oak trees also need full sunlight for seed germination and development.



Timber stand improvements

Timber stand improvement practices can be used to thin the forest stand by removing undesirable trees to favor more desirable trees, such as healthy oaks and hickories. This thinning stacks benefits for timber quality and wildlife habitat. By allowing more sunlight to reach the forest floor, it increases timber growth, stimulates greater oak regeneration and promotes growth of popular forage plants for deer. For oaks particularly, forest thinning gives the remaining trees more room to grow, resulting in increased acorn production.

Forest clearings

Creating small openings within dense forest stands is desirable when managing land for white-tailed deer. Much like forest thinning, these small areas also encourage the regeneration and growth of shade-intolerant species, such as valuable red and white oaks. Forest clearings are created by cutting all the trees and brush within an area of a few acres. Well designed openings are created with erosion impact in mind. Avoid creating openings along steep slopes.

Improving forest edge

Transitions from forest to field zones are also favorite whitetail habitat. This change from forest to field can be improved by creating gradual transitions of plant types. Thinning trees near the edge of woodlands and fields is called feathering. Removing larger trees adjacent to fields is one of the edge feathering technique that is used to promote the growth of small trees and shrubs that deer use for food and cover.





Forming a plan . . .

Forest stewardship plans

A management plan can help you get the most out of your property and maximize the potential benefits for white-tailed deer. Your local SWCD can help you develop a property management plan.

A Forest Stewardship Plan written by a certified plan writer, such as your local SWCD, the DNR or a private forest planner, qualifies landowners to apply for local or state tax-relief and incentive programs. To qualify for one of these programs, a landowner must generally have at least 20 qualifying acres of land.

The DNR's Forest Stewardship Program helps landowners finalize their own goals and prepare a professional, voluntary management plan for their woodland. A forest management plan (also known as a Woodland Stewardship Plan when written by a certified writer), is a non-binding, written document that lists your land's potential, what you want to accomplish, and specific actions you can take to accomplish those goals within a given time-frame.

Want to establish the perfect habitat for white-tail deer? Contact us to get started on a Forest Stewardship Plan

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