

LAND TRUST NOTES

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ITS ALL ABOUT THE DEER

The white-tailed deer is recognized and sought after by hunters and non-hunters as a traditional symbol of the outdoors and our connection to nature. Historically, it was a major source of food and clothing for Native Americans and the early settlers. Today it provides recreation to wildlife viewers and hunters, venison and hides for human use and a source of state revenues through the sale of hunting licenses. Deer belong to the family Cervidae as do elk, caribou and moose. Originally, deer populations were concentrated along the coast and southern regions of the state, limited by favorable habitat to survive New England winters. Today they can be found throughout the state, from the Atlantic to the Pacific Coast, from northern Canada to Mexico, and are the most widely distributed and abundant big game animal in North America. A reduction in predators and the creation, by human intervention, of favorable habitat are credited with increased numbers and wider distribution.

The most productive habitat for white tails is a combination of agricultural lands and forestlands. Deer prefer small forest openings with early stages of forest growth and benefit greatly from the proximity of this habitat to agricultural fields. Forest openings provide a variety of plants in the form of leaves and woody debris for feeding, while providing cover from potential predators. Deer are highly adaptable feeders and thus also benefit from older growth stands where acorns and beechnuts are abundant, lichens and mushrooms are present or from apple trees still producing in the forests of abandoned farms. Farmlands provide beneficial agricultural and residential food sources in close association with forested habitats. Deer can cause damage as they will feed on beans, strawberries, broccoli, beets, apples, hay, yews and cedars, to name just a few. Deer often graze hayfields or bed down damaging portions of hay crops especially when deer populations are high.

Deer reach sexual maturity at age two, mate in fall and produce usually two fawns annually. The metabolism of a pregnant doe increases dramatically in early April and nutrient needs increase rapidly. Large snowfalls during this time of year can stress these does and present a risk to both the doe and potential offspring. Fawns can stand within minutes of birth, but are relatively feeble for the first few days. They are totally dependent upon mother's milk for three weeks and wean in three to four months. The reddish-brown coat, with its familiar white spots is totally scentless providing excellent camouflage and avoidance defense against predators, as does an inherent ability to remain totally motionless in its hiding. Adult deer also change coats with the summer coat being made of short, wiry reddish-brown hairs. This coat is shed in early fall replaced by a winter coat of long, hollow, gray hairs providing excellent insulation for our coldest winters.

Deer are thought to be color-blind but have excellent eyesight pri-

marily adapted to detect movement. They have an acute sense of smell and a well developed sense of hearing. When observing them try standing still and watch their ears "radar" separately as they try to detect the slightest indication of danger, while sniffing the wind for a threatening scent.

Deer populations in New England have been influenced mostly by landscape scale changes by humans, since the arrival of the early settlers. Since the early 1960's a loss of agricultural land in New England and an increase in pole sized forest stands is cited as the main reason for declining deer populations in the area. Pole-sized forests are usually 20-35 years old, characterized by 6-10 inch diameter trees, densely packed with little or no undergrowth. They offer little in food value until mature enough to produce seed crops. If coniferous, these stands can provide valuable wintering areas with lower snow depths and thermal moderation. These "shelters" are often referred to as deer yards, with many individuals congregating January-March for its benefits. Favorable forage and wintering habitats can maintain healthy deer populations of 10-15 animals per square mile.

The GLLT incorporates many deer habitat practices into the management of its properties. The Beginning with Habitats Program, administered by the Maine Inland Fisheries and Wildlife, provides us with habitat assessments for potential deer yards. This information can guide our stewardship decisions as to where to avoid locating a snowmobile trail or when, where and how to conduct cutting activities. We carefully design thinnings in potential deer yards to maintain their beneficial characteristics, and time the thinning of nearby hardwood stands to provide winter forage for yarding deer. Thinning and selective cutting practices provide a continuous supply of new sprouts and understory vegetation for forage while encouraging the production of acorns and beechnuts on larger crowned trees. Creating small openings in the forest, through selective cutting or small patch cuts, diversifies forest age and species composition and makes available significant amounts of forage. Reviewing habitat types on abutting and nearby properties, a landscape approach, helps us determine the need or value of a particular practice beyond our boundary.

The GLLT shares the public appreciation for our native white tail for all the traditional and current values it brings to our society. We are pleased to participate in the health and well being of vibrant and viable populations for all to enjoy.

Tom Henderson

Much of the information for this article was adapted from the wildlife fact sheet titled "White-Tailed Deer", published by the University of NH Cooperative Extension and originally prepared by former wildlife specialist Lee Alexander.

(N) OH, DEER!

As the crow flies, our house in the Lower Bay is probably twenty-five flaps from the outlet of Sucker Brook. We bought our land thirty years ago, when the price was right. The owner of the land, living in Massachusetts, sold us one of six lots on Kezar Lake that he planned to develop. In order to inspect it, Joan and I had to work our way through thick woods following our realtor, Will Severance, who was then well into his seventies! (Ladies Delight Road had not then been extended to provide easier access.)

We liked the location. The view was nice and it had a sandy beach where Bp. George Cadigan had built a stone fireplace for his family to picnic, during one of their frequent canoe trips in the Lower Bay. A good spot for our three children to swim. It also had a natural spring, just a stones throw from the house we planned to build. Impressive as the view and the beach may have been, the deer tracks in the area of the spring were even more impressive. Their water hole seemed to be in the middle of a virtual deer yard. We could anticipate many early mornings and late evenings during our summer vacations, watching wild deer.

Alas, it was not to be. We not only built our house in their habitat, we also dug a well in the middle of their drinking water! Growing up in Maine, during the forties and early fifties, had conditioned me to believe that Maine farms and forests and their animal life would always remain the same. I would always be able to hunt and fish when and wherever I pleased. Not so, anymore.

The deer no longer congregate in the area of our well, and only occasionally do I see one or two on our property. They have moved away because we have moved in. I suppose if we were to tear down our house and fill-in the foundation, a few might come back. But I doubt it. There are many other houses around here, now. And I suspect none of us will want to be the first one to tear down his house to bring back the deer.

However, there is still unspoiled habitat in the towns of Lovell, Stoneham and Stowe, where hunters continue to go on their November ritual, and others go just to watch and take pictures of the deer. While I no longer hunt, and don't take many pictures, it is still nice to know that if I should want to do either, there are still places that I can. All of GLLT's properties are open to public access.

We can't afford to replace the deer habitat we have removed, but we like to know that there is still land in the region that we can help protect. When we send our annual contribution to The Greater Lovell Land Trust, this month, I am going to include a note asking Tom Henderson to acquire another deer yard. I may want to go deer hunting, again, or, more likely, just go and watch them. And I may even take up photography!

George Westerberg

JOIN US FOR THESE EVENTS

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Tracking Winter Animals

Wednesday, December 28 from 8-9 pm

Charlotte Hobbs Library

Tracker-naturalist David Brown will present a slide and video program on tracking wild animals in the Maine woods. Learn to distinguish the tracks, trails, and other sign of animals such as bobcats, coyotes, foxes, fishers, and otters, all of which are common in local woodlands but which hide from us at night or in foliage. The program will also show how to interpret trails for behavior of animals: Why are they here? What were they doing?

SNOWSHOE TRACKING

Saturday, December 31, 9 am to 12 noon

Meet in the GLLT parking area on Slab City Road

In this companion to the Wednesday evening program, we will don snowshoes and trek into the GLLT's Heald-Bradley Pond property to search for tracks and sign of the many wild animals that live there in the winter. About 2 miles will be covered at a slow pace, so dress warmly with snowproof boots, extra clothes and water. Participants should bring their own snowshoes. This program is recommended for reasonably fit people, free from any medical condition that might be aggravated by long periods of exertion in the cold. The program will run whether there is snow or not.

BEGINNER SNOWSHOE/WILDLIFE HIKE

Saturday February 11, 2006 9-12 noon

Join us on a hike of the Chip Stockford Reserve to visit this 165 acre working forest, explore the cultural history of the property and enjoy a fine view of Robbins Ridge and the Lower Bay of Kezar Lake. This casual hike of 1 mile will introduce participants to the 200 year history of the property to the community, its future as a conservation property under GLLT stewardship and provide participants the opportunity to witness the increased presence of several wildlife species. Participants should bring a small backpack with water, snacks, extra clothing and space to store a layer of clothing as needed, and a smile. For more information contact Tom Henderson at 207-925-1056, tomgllt@earthlink.net or Margaret Nomentana at 925-6575.

BEGINNER SNOWSHOE-JANUARY 21, 2006

GLLT and volunteers of the Appalachian Mountain Club (AMC) are sponsoring a beginner snowshoe hike at our Sucker Brook Preserve on January 21. We will explore the 101 acres at the south end of Horseshoe Pond looking for wildlife and enjoying the beauty around Horseshoe Pond. Pre-registration is requested by contacting Dale Temm 207-883-5260 or Cindy Sheckley 207-883-5260.

GREAT BROOK RESTORATION PROJECT—JANUARY 12, 2006

The USFS is implementing a "cutting edge" fish habitat restoration project to restore native fish populations to Great Brook. The initial phases are complete and the USFS will present its goals, the techniques used and the findings to date. Those interested in fish, stream dynamics, and the intricate relationship between wood and water are encouraged to attend. The program will be held at the Stoneham Fire and Rescue Barn, beginning at 7:00 pm. Contact Tom Henderson for more information 925-1056.

THE GREATER LOVELL LAND TRUST is a 501 © (3) tax exempt organization that seeks to preserve wildlife habitat while encouraging the traditional industries of sustainable forestry, working farms and outdoor recreation in the region. The Land Trust invites your gifts of property, conservation easements and direct financial support. Address inquiries and send contributions to Tom Henderson, Director, P.O. Box 181, Center Lovell, ME 04016 or call 207-925-1056.