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Photo by Craig Robbins

October 2021

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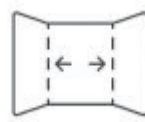
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Duck decoys are pictured deployed.

Photo by
Craig Robbins



The Physiology of a Decoy Spread

By Craig Robbins, *The Post-Journal Outdoors Columnist*

When it comes to waterfowl decoy spreads, bigger isn't always better.

Decoys and decoy spreads are a touchy subject with waterfowl hunters given the wide range of advice and recommended strategies including something as simple as a Texas rig. There are a bunch of great videos out there about the use of decoy spreads, but for me, practicality is the name of the game, which is why I believe in using small decoy spreads.

Large spreads of decoys are expensive and require transport that usually comes in the form of a boat, which is also not cheap. For a budget-conscious hunter, hiking or canoeing into your spot does not allow for large decoy spreads. I have found that small spreads of 12 to 18 decoys can do the trick as long as they are used properly. To

be effective, you have to be smart and consider certain factors to make the decoys work for you.

When making your strategy, it's important to understand why large decoy spreads work. The whole idea of large spreads is to create a sense of safety. Ducks see the large group as a place where they can hang out undisturbed. Another advantage of a large spread is being able to guide incoming ducks to land in a specific spot. A pre-planned landing strip is key to making effective shots. Finally, large decoy spreads are simply easier to spot from the air. To make them even more convincing, people often use motion decoys or other movement decoys that create the sense of other ducks landing and moving through the decoys.

With that all said, early season ducks are generally easy ducks, or so they say, but the decoy world is a world of competition. Other hunters are feeling the excitement in the early season and are pulling out all the stops, including all of their decoys. One of the things to remember in the early season is that ducks are still in smaller family groups as they are starting their migration. They do not need to group up in larger flocks because the weather is still fairly warm for the season. To be effective with decoys, we need to think of why the ducks are moving.

Early season ducks are going from their roost to feed and then going back to the roost again, assuming that the feed isn't already in their roosting area. Convincing ducks has everything to do with food. Finding a spot that is fairly open will allow space to spread out the decoys and make smaller, looser groups. Put some feeders towards the middle and some sleepers in groups closer to cover to make it look like a good spot to hang out for the day with plenty of food and cover for rest.

As the season continues, smaller decoy spreads can still have a major advantage. Most ducks move with cold fronts; if there is access to food, they will stick around in an area before heading south.

This leads to educated ducks. The traditional idea of setting out lots of decoys in the late season can actually work against you, especially in heavily hunted areas. Being unique can make a difference when it comes to fooling these educated ducks.

Another advantage of having a small spread in the late season is the ability to be mobile. A smaller set of decoys will allow you to hike into areas that are mostly locked up with ice or otherwise inaccessible by boat.

When setting up a small spread in the late season, it's important to stack the odds on your side. It's even more important

to set up where ducks want to be. Looking for coves or holes is key. When setting up decoys, think of staying warm. Setting up some sleepers close to some swimmer decoys can give the impression of a spot where ducks can help each other stay warm. Feeders tend to work better in the outskirts of those small groups.

It's important to make your decoys visible, even though this can be the hardest part. Small groups of ducks won't be out in the middle of the water trying to stay warm, especially on windy days. One of the tricks I've learned is to set swimmers so that they are facing the group, perhaps even using a couple to make it look like they are swimming towards the group. This adds visibility to the decoys and, when calling ducks, it brings attention to your decoys. I usually expect ducks to circle an extra time before committing to these late-season decoy spreads.

When it comes to the late season, remember that snow and ice do not build up on real ducks.

Ducks have warm bodies, so it's important to ensure that you don't splash water on your decoys when setting them up in freezing conditions. The ice reflects light and that light can shake ducks off of your decoys. Depending on the conditions, it'll be important to walk out and break ice off of your decoys at regular intervals. Just bring your shotgun with you, because you never know when ducks are coming in. Ice can also build up on the keel of your decoys, so keep an eye on how they are swimming in the water. If the swim doesn't look natural, ducks will flare out, too.

Oftentimes, moving locations or rearranging my decoys is all it takes to turn a lousy day into a productive one.

A duck call, if used correctly, should get ducks to look at your decoys. Once they notice your spread, the decoys should do the rest of the work. While factors differ between early and late season or the weather conditions on any given day, some things are universal. When I was learning how to set up my decoys, I spent a considerable amount of time watching ducks on ponds and areas that I planned to hunt. This was more than just bird watching; I was studying them to see how they moved in groups and how they were hanging out. The whole point of setting up decoys is to copy the natural behavior of waterfowl. That same concept matters when shopping for decoys, too. A mixture of feeders and sleepers can add confidence to your decoy spread.

At the end of the day, it doesn't matter how many decoys you take on your hunt. The key is to mimic a safe and welcoming spot for incoming ducks. There are no magic numbers or setups that work in every situation. Observe the ducks, try something new, and be ready to adapt as you go to ensure that your small spread of decoys is truly working for you. ■



Public Land Bucks in Allegheny Forest

By Lee Oaks

This past summer I had an old friend start watching hunting videos on something the young folks call YouTube.

Now, I am not much into watching hunting shows anymore, but my buddy Willy decided it was worth his time, which he has plenty of in retirement. Between waiting for the little miss while she's shopping at the local beauty shop for hair curlers, he sits in his truck watching public land hunting shows on his phone.

Then, he feels he must share with me each and every hunt just like he was there firsthand. There was one that he got hooked on about hunting public land monster bucks. Each week he would spend hours explaining to me how these folks killed wall hangers on public land. Being from the city, Willy has only hunted farmland bucks where feeding and bedding areas are his key target ambushes.

He knew that I lived a short drive from a section of the Allegheny National Forest. Now ANF offers over half a million acres to hunt for anybody that is willing to put in the time and effort to get after deer. We got together one summer afternoon Sunday after church and started putting a plan together.

Like everything in this case for many a good reason there are a "few" rules regarding land use and hunting in the ANF. Me and Willy have used tree stands in the past and hope to do the same in this outing. Stands in the ANF can't be put up before two weeks before archery season, can't be permanent in nature, must not dig into the bark of the tree, must be clearly identified with the owner's name, address, and phone number or with a PA Game Commission CID number or a PA Game Commission tree stand number and must be taken down within two weeks after season ends. These are just a "few" of the rules.

Let us discuss the new rules this year for hunters in Pennsylvania.

8 October 2021

Expanding Sunday hunting to three Sundays in November (14, 21 and 28), digital licenses can be carried in with you, but harvest tags still need to be paper form. Extended bear season has been moved up to opening day of deer season. We always make sure we double check all regulations new and old before we head out because, as always, things change, and it's our responsibility to know them all.

One of the rules that we stumbled upon when studying up in ANF was about hanging posted signs on ANF lands to keep folks out of your honey holes. After much thought and burning the midnight oil thinking about this rule, one would have to think that making such a rule about posting no hunting signs, that someone must have actually hung posted signs on Allegheny National Forest land. Imagine you have walked a couple miles back into a spot on the Allegheny National Forest, 517,000 acres, and see posted signs in the middle of the forest.

After doing our research we discovered there are quite a few rules and one needs to know and understand them. We also decided it was only going to be a big buck hunt, so we needed to brush up on our big buck hunting tricks.

When you choose to pursue big bucks on public land, the honey holes and hotspots can be few and far between. But don't let that fool you. They are there, you just have to find them. Years of hunting land where other folks are hunting has taught me to look for spots that other hunters overlook or walk by.

The thing that Willy kept telling me over the years that he discovered when he was younger was, "if you want to kill big bucks you have to be where big bucks are." Willy, or as I nicknamed him a few years ago, Captain Obvious, is not the sharpest pencil in the box.

The key to the above statement when hunting public lands is to find said spots before anybody else does and then getting in there first. While poring over topographical maps, which we found at a Walmart while looking for our camo TP, we uncovered several areas that looked promising. For this hunt we were looking for lowlands, like beaver dams or swampy areas.

Several years ago, I was on a public land hunting/journey and came across an area that wasn't far off the road that offered some wetland/swampy areas. What I figured out was there were a few deer paths going in and out of the area. It wasn't until I was able to shimmy up a tree that overlooked a good section of the area, that a light bulb went off in my head (or maybe it was a branch I hit coming down) that what I saw that day changed me forever.

The next morning, I took an old climbing stand, made by Loggie, hugged the tree, and worked my way up the tree. As the sun began to show its face through the deep forest, I watched two separate bucks make their way in and out to the bog. All day long I watched bucks come and go from this area and when hunters were close by, they tucked back in and waited for them to pass.

What I needed to do was find such a spot in ANF.

I gave it hours of thought and figured we would do the same thing we do when fishing a new body of water. We look for areas we like to fish on other bodies of water, fish them and cross off what is productive and what wasn't. This system gets the areas down a lot that we feel must cover.

I was convinced we would do the same thing while tackling half million acres of land we have never set foot on. During our first "scouting" weekend, we crossed off a bunch of land and put our effort in a small area. After our second "scouting" trip we finalized where we were going to hunt.

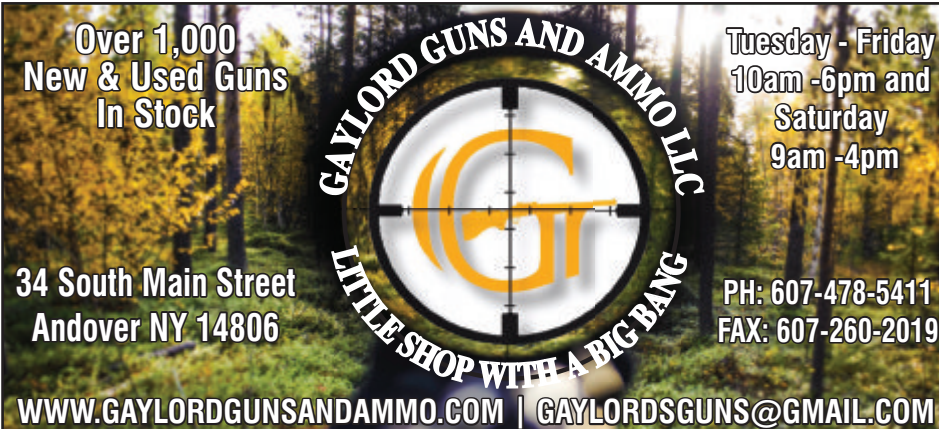
One thing that Willy always says, "big bucks don't like to be around people, so go where no humans would go." Thank you again, Captain Obvious. While Captain Obvious does have a flair for the obvious, he does make a good point every now and again, and boy, do I hear about it when he is right.

Another thing we considered is that public land many times has little food on it, but property close by may offer good sources. If you can find area of public land that butts up against private land with a good food source, you have a good spot. The key here is not too close. Figure the landowner whose land is next to a public hunting area has had hunters come to their property to recover a deer he has been watching for a couple years now. If they are hunters, a problem is going to no doubt occur.

Sitting up on these areas is very tricky but can be done if planned properly. We prefer to sit far enough away so as not to disturb others hunting on private property. Also keep in mind that while you can hunt public land, so can everybody else, including the neighbors, but you can't without permission step foot on their property. Use caution when setting up and in shot placement on any deer you shoot.

Whether it's the ANF or other public land, always look for good escape route/thick cover nearby. Big bucks don't like to hide in spots where they must escape through open areas. In low land, they love to be on high ground surrounded by water. This protects them from hunters and predators. Put 6 inches of water on the ground and suddenly hunters won't enter. I don't get that, but I see it all the time. In hilly terrain, look for them on the sunny side about two-thirds up the hill.

We have done our homework for the upcoming season and are ready for opening day (November 27th) and the bonus Sunday. As the nerves of a certainly a sleepless night will accompany me as we drive down Route 6 I'm sure Willy, as he always does, be talking a mile a minute and on his third extra large black coffee, but knowing we will be joining a fraternity of hunters that for hundreds of years has hunted Allegheny National Forest land will be reassuring. ■



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Pictured are just some of the gizmos and gadgets available for hunters this year.

Photo by Gene Pauczek



Gadgets, Gizmos and Gotta Haves

By Gene Pauczek, , *Dunkirk OBSERVER Outdoor Columnist*

I figure I have been hunting for over 50 years.

I am not the best hunter, and have eaten a number of my deer tags. My dad didn't hunt and when I quizzed him on why, he replied. "I traded in my fishing and hunting licenses when I got a marriage license," and I left it at that. My mom Annie was the oldest of seven kids who was born in a farm house in Arkwright. Her dad died at an early age so she took over helping raise the kids. Mom was a farm girl used to country living, and she passed on to her kids a lot of her love of nature and life in general. In addition, she (and some of us) tend to save everything, because you never know when it might come in handy.

Two uncles, a couple of high school friends with cars and the local library helped teach me about hunting. Reading can take you places that are limited by reality but friends with cars can take you out in the country, where the wild things roam. It wasn't until I discovered bow hunting, that I increased my list of needful things for example camouflage clothing.

LESSON #1. Successful bow hunting means close range. Forget the 50-yard shots that the chest pounders brag about. Most archery kills are from 20 feet or less. A white tailed deer's number one defense is it's uncanny sense of smell, followed by it's sight and hearing. A hunter will try to avoid placing their smell in a direct path to the deer, by playing the wind direction and or getting above the deers location via tree stand.

10 October 2021

Camo clothing with scent-blocking ability will improve your odds. When scent block clothing first hit the market it was pricey . Over the years it has become affordable and for many hunters it is a necessity. Odor masking scents like Fall Foliage will help cover up human scent and using doe in heat and rutting buck scent will at times attract deer.

Masking scents work all season while attractants tend to work best closer to, or during the rut or mating season.

Chronic Waste Disease has the ability to decimate large portions of the deer population and scientists are concerned that sometimes deer urine could be a CWD carrying agent so use caution if you use scents with actual deer urine. One masking scent used by one hunter that works is apple cider/juice.

Apples are a natural food for deer and if you get thirsty, you are all set.

Deer calls: Most bow hunters carry at least one form of deer calling. Various deer experts advise that deer have their own language and imitating that lingo can attract deer, thus drawing them closer. The "Can" or doe bleat has been around for decades and still works. However it can go off when you are un-prepared. Buck grunts, doe bleats, fawn distress calls all seem to have their place, when used properly and at the right time.

Rattling horns: Charles Alsheimer was a famous author, photographer, lecturer, and deer hunter who helped introduce rattling to many local deer hunters. The technique of hitting two deer antlers together to attract deer originated out west, but proved to be successful further north. The sound imitates two male deer fighting one another.

When done properly it will attract one or more deer with-in ear shot. An antler bag containing various lengths of wooden dowels inside a cloth bag can effectively imitate this sound. A pair of actual deer antlers will do the same when done properly. Synthetic antlers sound great but are bulky and pricey even on sale.

Breathable/waterproof/fleece type camouflage clothing will keep you in the woods longer and in comfort, thus increasing your chances of harvesting your outdoor prey.

Trail cameras: The new kids on the block have quickly become one of the hottest items on the must-have deer hunter list — especially ones that can be viewed on your phone without going on site to remove the memory chip.

Decoys: Decoys are great for hunting turkey, waterfowl and even predators and deer — if you own your own property. Portaging decoys gets old real quick, especially if the decoys are heavy. Deer decoys tend to be hollow and are made of plastic and "klunk" when struck. There was a battery operated device that had a delay switch that would impart action to a

deer tail causing it to flick at timely intervals. This item broke easily, was a bit pricey and used on deer decoys, which did not rate high on the personal opinion scale.

Motion duck decoys: Some hunters swear by these dekes. Others swear at them. Wind causes lots of action and it's free.

Battery operated socks: They're hard to find and the batteries go dead too often. Try the chemical hand warmers.

Stainless steel thermos: Hot coffee in a duck blind, boat or tree stand is hard to beat on a cold miserable day. Energy bars and beverages will boost your metabolism and are easier and lighter to portage in and out.

Screw-in portable umbrellas: I found this item years ago and it can save the day when it rains/or snows. They are lightweight, cheap and functional. Just don't forget to unscrew it and take home with you.

Cell phone: Don't leave home without it, but make sure it is fully charged.

Compass: Less likely to fail you when your GPS/phone runs out of juice.

Toilet Paper: It beats using dry leaves and can be used as a fire starter. If you remembered to bring water proof matches or a disposable lighter.

Ziplock plastic bags: These hold your lunch, keep your phone dry, as well as gloves, socks, candy, snacks, and smaller items, and it can bring home the liver/heart for that relative that bugs you for them.

Back pack: Lightweight carry all.

Folding camp stool: They are more comfortable than the cold damp ground or rock/log and they are portable but they seem to get heavier carrying them out of the woods at the end of the day.

Field dressing kits: Low cost and efficient, and when used properly it enhances the table fare and saves your clothing.

Bandanna: Read the scout manual for some of the many uses of the bandanna such as a make-shift arm sling, tourniquet, water filter and snot rag to name a few. Do not use white or yellow for safety sake.

A plastic whistle: Use it for safety sake if you get lost or get hurt. It will reach out further and last longer than your voice.

Your smart phone usually has a number of devices including a built in camera. Remember to take photos and make memories. And always hunt safe!

I hope you found some of these suggestions useful. Not everyone has the benefit of parental guidance and sometimes you need a place to start. Enjoy the outdoors and the hunt. Bringing home wild game is a bonus. ■

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Keeping Your Early Archery Season Slipups to a Minimum

By Craig Robbins, *The Post-Journal Outdoors Columnist*

Every year I listen as many hunters tell me that they don't start hunting with a stick and string until the rut.

I listen to their reasoning, and while they offer many good points, I still enjoy spending time swinging from a tree.

Now, there are dozens of the things that archery hunters must keep in mind each time they strap on their tree harness, early season hunters have a unique set of challenges they must overcome.

Many of the early season challenges are the same for "rut" hunters, but early season hunters have one more thing to keep in their mind. Over the years I have compiled a list of early season hunting mistakes from various sources, many of these I have had personal experiences with.

The first few weeks of fall hunters can experience major weather changes. One morning it could be in the low 40s, and then a couple days later we can have a 20-degree temperature swing. With those changes, comes a shift in wind direction.

There is nothing worse than starting your hunt with the perfect wind only to discover shifting winds blowing your scent directly over travel routes or food sources. It's no secret that scent control should be a staple of your overall hunting routine, but in the early season it is perhaps more important than any

other time. This is simply because of the high temperatures and the limited amount of clothing that you are wearing.

One of the easiest ways to control scent while you're in a tree stand is not to wear your actual hunting clothes to and from your stand. Carry your hunting clothing in a large plastic bag — there are other opinions out there — and then change either at your stand or close to it. It's surprising how much scent control a heavy-duty black garbage bag offers when sealed properly.

How many times have you been hunting overlooking a cut corn field, apple orchard or oak ridge, and either you can't get off a good shot or the deer you're hunting hasn't shown up yet, and then shooting time is over. If you have spent any time in fall woods hunting deer, this will happen to you. The question, is do you have an exit plan?

Hunting near food sources in the early season means you are going to get caught in your stand while deer are feeding nearby. How are you going to handle this situation?

Having a plan is important to get out of the stand safely and not give the deer any idea that you are there is important.

One of things I have carried with me the past few years is a coyote call. This will no doubt clear the field or apple orchard, with little harm to giving your location. While deer don't like the sound of a coyote near them, they're all fairly used to the sound and put distance between them and the "sound", this will give you a change to sneak out of your stand without being seen.

This old-school, tried-and-true technique is simple. If you are hunting a field edge and deer are in the field keeping you from getting to your true undetected, get ahold of a friend and have them pull up to the field. Generally, just showing up at a field at dusk while chasing deer off or something as simple as beeping the horn from the road will often empty a field.

Of course, the best way is to have a back-up exit route that will not take you by the deer or give away your presence. This generally is a longer walk but is well worth the effort, keeping your deer oblivious to your location.

Outside of scent control and wind direction, the biggest mistake is practice — or lack thereof. Throughout your pre-season practicing, how many times have you actually practiced a shot from a stand or elevated position?

This is a must no matter what you read or what you hear. It is true today's bows are much faster than years past. There is more than aiming a little high at particular distances, there are angles to take in account. Shooting your target dots on the ground is different than shooting at a deer from 15-plus feet up. Knowing and understanding these angles on

proper shot placement is imperative. Making a clean kill shot is your responsibility as a hunter, as is knowing how to make the best shot in any situation.

Another mistake that I think we all can admit to making is not spending enough time pre-scouting. Perhaps the best time to pattern a big buck is in the weeks leading up to opening day. Food dominates the thoughts of a deer at this time and they pretty much stick to the same routine unless an outside variable like scouting pressure or changes in food availability change that.

This is one of pet peeves — checking trail camera too often. Trail cameras are a double-edged sword. On one side they are a great scouting tool, but when you check them all the time, you could be bumping your wall hanger. Hence, this the main reason we made the switch to cell cameras. The pictures are sent directly from your camera to your cell phone. Word to the wise, share this technology with your better half. It will save some explaining why your text alert keeps going off in the middle of the night. Just saying.

If you know there a shooter is using the area, then hang a camera early. Work out your game plan based on the information that you have gathered. Remember trail cameras are a tool, they aren't the end-all of hunting tools. They're just part of the tool box.

If you have a particular deer, you are after, you need to understand the food sources, not just what the food sources have been but what they will be when plan on hunting. If there are apples in the area where you plan on setting up, understand that apples may or may not be dropping when you can hunt your stand. Understanding food sources and how and when deer will be hitting them is a key to hunters' success, especially during the early season.

Successful hunters understand how important it is to stay one step ahead of the deer by understanding which food sources will be available not only when the season opens but in the weeks that follow too.

Those hunting hardwoods need to know the availability of mast crops as well as which ridges hold oaks that are actually dropping them. Also, the bounty of food plots can change depending on how hard they've been hit during the pre-season and how the weather has affected their overall growth.

Knowing the food sources in your hunting areas and when deer are using them before and during the season will make you more successful.

These are a few things that mess up any archery hunt, early or regular season but just a few. In no particular order: not practicing with your broadheads to not practicing with your "nocks" to making sure to always carry an extra release with you to making sure you always have an extra release in your backpack.

Archery hunting my is one of favorite hunting seasons. There are many things I love about early season archery hunting, to just limit it one thing is impossible. Archery season is fun, exciting and will not only make you a better hunter but a better person. In a strange way, hunting during archery season will help

you begin to understand how to deal with the unexpected and how to avoid the unexpected in the future.

Keep shooting your bow through the season. This will not only keep all the muscles you worked on through the summer in shape but will keep your confidence up when that once in a lifetime buck steps into your shooting lane.

Remember to always think safety first, and to always wear a safety harness when hunting from a stand. ■



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Catching Steelhead Trout in Erie: What You Need to Know

By Brian Whipkey, *Erie Times-News*

Steelhead fishing around the tributaries of Lake Erie can be incredible. The key is knowing what works and doesn't for these unique fish in Pennsylvania.

The anticipation of hooking into a large 25-inch trout makes Erie an annual destination for many anglers across the commonwealth.

When the fish were young, they were stocked in the shallow creeks and then they swam into Lake Erie. Now they are following that mental imprint and scent of the stream to return to home during the spawning time of the year.

Kirk Rudzinski, owner East End Angler sport shop, Josh Feltenberger, FishUSA pro shop manager, and Dan Seaman, owner of Elk Creek Sports Store, recently shared their advice on how to fish during different water conditions and times of year.

WATER LEVELS

Low and clear: Clear water can be difficult fishing as the fish notice people walking around the waterways. "Their eyesight is incredible," Rudzinski said. He added that steelhead can sense when people are walking along the creek.

Feltenberger said fishermen in low, clear water need to be stealthy by using longer fishing poles and not using bobbers.

Kirk Rudzinski, owner East End Angler, shows some of the woolly bugger and mop flies that catch steelhead.

He suggests using small minnows and flies such as woolly buggers in natural colors. He said white, olive, black, brown and tan are good choices this time of year.

Rising water: Rudzinski suggests night crawlers or red worms in these conditions. He said the San Juan worm that looks like a small red worm with a hook in the middle works well, and some fly patterns that have been effective are nymphs and woolly buggers.

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Kirk Rudzinski, owner East End Angler, said anglers can find success using San Juan worms and nymphs for steelhead.

Both men said, for live bait, emerald shiner minnows are a good choice. Steelhead that have been living in 70 feet of water or more are used to seeing emerald shiners and will take them on their way to the shallow creek waters. Feltenberger said to keep in mind steelhead can smell and will be attracted to the minnows. Rudzinski advises anglers to hook the bait fish through the top lip to allow the minnow to still be able to swim.

Feltenberger feels streamers sometimes work better than nymphs, but anglers have been catching fish with nymphs, too. Single salmon eggs have been working as well.

High water: Rudzinski said when the creeks are high, it's difficult to fish. "Our creek bottoms are shale and become violent." He said heavy rains will make the streams cloudy, dirty and turbulent – like water coming out of a pipe.

He said during high water you don't want to wade as you can't see where you are stepping in the murky, fast moving water. During high water you should fish near the edges in little eddies of slow moving water.

Lake Erie: Fish often stage at the mouths of the Lake Erie tributaries waiting to swim up stream. Rudzinski said some of the popular lures to use are spoons like Kastmaster, Cleo, Pheobe and KO Wobbler. Preferred color choices are blue and chrome, and green and chrome that emulate the shiners swimming in the region.

Size spoon sizes range from 1/12 of an ounce up to 1/2 ounce. He said the deeper the water, the larger the spoon. "If you choose the 1/2 ounce, you will be donating it to the creek pretty quick," he said about trying a larger, heavier spoon in shallow water. "If I'm casting into a creek, I'm down to the 1/12 ounce," he said.

Feltenberger offers some similar options. For fish that are staging in front of the creeks, anglers are using Rooster Tail spinners, spoons and small crank baits where the fish are still holding in the lake.

BAIT

Single salmon eggs: Feltenberger said to use a small size 16 to 20 hook with a single egg. Rudzinski feels single egg patterns will work about all year in a variety of colors such as pink, white, orange, yellow and green.

Rudzinski said egg sacks are effective, too. Sport shops have Chinook eggs that are placed in small mesh that are placed on your hook.

Josh Feltenberger, FishUSA pro shop manager in Erie, shows some of the tackle that has been working for steelhead trout.

Waxworms, grubs and maggots: Live bait can be fished at varying depths with the use of a bobber in slow moving waters. Rudzinski said for the purist, "it's a strike indicator," he said about bobbers. When fishing rapids, you don't use a bobber, just a couple split shots to hold your line down.

Seaman, who has owned his sports store for 43 years, said the early season baits are spoons and spinners and also crank-bait because fish will chase them in warmer waters. Also popular are PowerBait dough bait, minnows and mag-gots, tipping jigs. As the waters cool down later in the season, Seaman said the PowerBait does not work as well and the spoons slow down also. Minnows and nightcrawlers become popular and jigs continue to work.

Kirk Rudzinski, owner East End Angler, shares a photo of artificial flies named Crystal Meth that work well for steelhead trout.

Artificial flies: Both Rudzinski and Feltenberger said artificial flies, streamers and nymphs work well.

Rudzinski mentioned several colorful names of flies that are available including Scrambled eggs, which are a fluffy egg shape in different colors, Crystal Meth, which is a sparkling fly with strings trimmed around it, and sucker spawn, which has loops in it.

Kirk Rudzinski, owner East End Angler, says artificial flies like sucker spawn are great for steelhead trout.

FISHING POLE OPTION

Noodle rods: With water being clear, it's helpful to use as thin a line as possible. To make that happen, there are noodle rods that are much longer than typical spinning rods. The long, 9- to-12-foot noodle rods absorb some of the fight that is normally only placed on the fishing line. The rod can act like a shock absorber, allowing anglers to use 4- or 6-pound test line to reel-in heavy steelhead.

Rudzinski said fishermen with standard spinning rods are using 10-pound test lines and sometimes the fish can see the line and won't bite. With a noodle rod, Rudzinski starts out with 6-pound test line and if doesn't work well, he goes to a thinner 4-pound line.

Big fish: 53-inch musky among the biggest fish caught in Pennsylvania

For gear, Feltenberger also suggests noodle rods with a 10-pound test line. He said you need to add a leader about 18 to 24 inches long of 4- or 6-pound line near your bait. The thinner line is less detectable to the fish.

MISTAKES AND MISCONCEPTIONS

Feltenberger shares a few of the misconceptions/mistakes steelhead anglers make.

Wading: One of the biggest misconceptions he said is that anglers feel the need to wade. The fish are sensitive to the surroundings, and wading can move the fish away from you or make them uninterested in your lure. "The fish don't get as much credit as they deserve," he said about their wariness.

Dress properly: "Lake Erie is notorious for the weather changing. Sometimes you can experience all four seasons in one day," Feltenberger said about having layers of clothing available to suit the weather conditions.

Right size of gear: Another misconception new steelhead fishermen believe is that you need heavy tackle. Feltenberger said you don't need 12-pound line at your hook to reel in steelhead, but you also don't want to show up with an ultralight fishing set-up either.

Not trying something different: "Try switching it up," he said about sticking with a bait or presentation too long. Just because something worked two years ago, doesn't mean it's the fly or bait to use this season.

Not doing your homework: Anglers have plenty of resources online. He said go to YouTube and other sources to learn about this special style of fishing in Pennsylvania. "We have the internet to find anything and do anything."

Another resource: If you are planning a trip to Erie, you can monitor the lake and Trout Run conditions by going to the FishUSA.com website. They have a live video camera where the creek flows into Lake Erie on Avon Beach. (The creek is classified as a nursery water and cannot be fished.) You can see if there are waves on the lake and how plentiful the fishermen are on those days. "It shows you what it's like," he said. The shop partnered with Fairview Township, Sons of Lake Erie and the PA Steelhead Association on the live cam project.

Shop local and learn: He said anglers need to stop in the local sporting good stores and talk to the people. "We'll tell you what's going on. Stop in and talk to us."

Feltenberger likes fishing and "It gives me joy to see people catching their first steelhead. ■

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Are Tree Stands the Perfect Choice for Chasing Deer?

By Craig Robbins, *The Post-Journal Outdoors Columnist*

For most hunters, we spent years hunting from the ground before we started swinging from the trees.

From sitting on a log, perched up against an oak tree to man-made blinds, some of my earliest years hunting were spent on the ground. Recently I took a walk down memory lane and attempted to do the math on how many deer I killed from the ground or from stand. Now, remember I am old, so my math may be a little off, but it's a pretty even split.

It seems that the first years we would spend hunting from the ground and move up to — no pun intended — tree stands. But what I am finding in recent years — remember I am old — I find it more comfortable to hunting from the ground, depending on situations of course.

Each season often dictates how and where we hunt. One thing for certain is we all know that weather affect the way wildlife feeds, travels and breeds, no matter whether they're above or below the water, fly or walk, weather has an impact on wildlife. Being portable and freeing yourself up to hunt either from the ground or from the trees will increase your odds at getting deer on a consistent basis.

How the weather is going to impact the first a few weeks of deer season is anybody's guess. But according to my trusty Farmer Almanac, deer will continue on in their early fall patterns. Local farmers have been cutting corn a little later than normal, which should help keep deer close to field edges.

We all have learned that once fields are cut — whether corn, alpha or oats — it will be a magnet for deer. Fresh cut fields are always your best bet for deer season action.

But the key is getting between where the deer are bedded and the right trail they are using to get to the field. Throw in wind direction, the right tree and thermoclines, and playing leapfrog with deer is a game we all play.

I'm going to share something that has worked for many archers across the country and the region — hunting from the ground.

Now, it may seem that we are taking a step back in time. When I first started hunting the only way we hunted was from the ground. That was before we had discovered that hunting from elevated platforms was the way to go.

Now I am not saying that we should sell all our tree stands and hunt from the ground, but ground blinds have their place in particular situations and areas. Today's portable ground blinds

are very different then the one we used to make out of sticks and brush.

Between Primos/Double Bull and AmeriStep these two companies have reinvented the portable blind. Today, we can change locations as easily as putting up a portable blind. While it's not as easy as picking any old spot and setting up a portable blind, it is much more effective than spending time setting up a tree stand.

Setting up a portable blind can be very effective if one is using all the knowledge you would in tree stand placement — except on the ground.

The biggest mistake I see hunters make in setting up portable ground blind is not brushing them in the area they are hunting. This can be as easy as setting the blind back in an edge row or by placing some brush on the blind. But the biggest mistake I see is having all the windows in the blind open. Utilize only the windows that offer the best shooting options. It is always best to have the back part of the blind totally blacked out. This will keep your movement hidden in the black drop of the blind.

When using a ground blind be creative.

While hunting from the ground it isn't as cut and dry as just setting up a portable ground blind, it's a tool that can be used.

Having the opportunity to hunt with folks from different sections of the country has given me the chance to watch how they do things. Whether it's using a portable blind during an archery hunt for filming an archery hunt to using the same set-up for a cameraman to get another angle for a tree stand hunt, you can learn a lot.

When choosing a portable blind make sure you pick one that has a camo pattern that is close to where and how you are going to hunt. Again blending into your surroundings is key to set up. Take a few minutes to blend into the area by brushing the blind in. This can be easily done by taking brush and branches that are laying and placing it up against the blind.

Using a portable blind shouldn't be your sole hunting technique but can be used as a part of your bag of tricks.

When you can not find the perfect tree, using a portable blind can be an option. ■

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Heading to the River this Fall

By Lee Oaks

Fall fishing in our part of whitetail country can be some of the most exciting times of the season for those willing to put up with a little bit of weather.

When heading out onto the water this time of year, it's best to leave shorts and muscle shirts at home. Whether it's the river or the reservoir, being on the water during the fall season can be exciting and a bit dangerous.

It wasn't too long ago, actually it probably was that we were at home at our fall hunting property via the river. When we first discovered what we used to call honeysuckle, we would load up the canoe packed with enough gear for a day's outing and head out in the darkness for our trip.

After sliding the canoe down the bank and into the water, we would rope crawl our gear and persons down to the water, load up and head out in the cover of darkness. At the time we were sure that nobody knew who we were or where we were off too.

We set out paddling into the cover of darkness past the third bend in the river, looking for the overhanging maple tree. Now I am sure that it's no huge surprise for those that Ron never believed in safety, not even the basics, so no life jackets were worn the first few seasons.

As time went on and our bodies started to feel the wear and tear of hunting trips, rope climbing up the bank from the river to the road with gear and canoe was getting a little old. We soon discovered putting in a launch and traveling a little bit further via the water was well worth the effort. Plus, with our new investment of an electric motor it made the trip much quicker and quieter.

During our first trip up the river in our new set-up we found we had time to hunt each day and were more refreshed — Ron's words, not mine. As luck would have it, I was able to shoot a buck, which made our new set-up even more exciting, and we felt that we had stumbled on the best day on the river.

As I was first back to the canoe, I loaded my venison into and was waiting proudly for a hunting partner. The smile on his face was ear to ear as he peaked over the bank into the river. We both thought we had just killed a 60-inch moose and brought it back to camp via a canoe, hey even guys can dream.

We gathered our gear, stuffed the buck in the bow, fired up the electric motor and off we returned. As the sun began to dip over the Alleghany mountains, we both kidded how much easier this new set up was instead of rowing.

It was about that time that I noticed the canoe was moving slower, of course I figured that extra weight was the reason. It was long before I began to understand, that wasn't entirely the truth. It seems the battery didn't get a full charge after a late summer test run.

Well, we never claimed to be the smartest rednecks, we only had one oar with us, trying to save room, you know. Well after we discussed the reason for our current situation. See it like this, our partnership was like most or so I thought. I bought the motor and

Ron bought the battery. At the end of our trips, I would take the motor with me and seeing how Ron owned the canoe and battery he would take them. Well common sense would dictate that charging the battery would be something one should do after each use. Again, we never claim to have common sense.

As we rowed the last three-quarters of a mile with one oar, up river back to the launch, I had much time to think. While most would figure that I would be concerned about what the old lady was going to say on coming home just before midnight, I was thinking about getting a new hunting partner with common sense.

As I row back into the darkness upriver with one oar, a canoe overfilled with gear, deer and humans, the time changed my life. I'm not totally sure HOW it changed these 40 some years later, but I'm sure it did.

The one thing I know for sure, that even was the last time I was on any watercraft without a life jacket. Staying in turn with the weather should be on the top of the list of things to check off fall and early winter days. This hunting trip proved to me that myself or anybody will never leave the dock, everybody wearing a Coast Guard-approved Type 1 jacket. These jackets are the best the money can buy — maybe a bit of overkill for inland waterways, but they are the best.

Over the years the canoe was upgraded to a car top that was perfect for the river. It's much safer and plenty of room for safety gear, heck we even carried a first aid kit with us. It wasn't your traditional first aid kit, while it did have a couple bandages and tape but found it a perfect place to goose jerky also. ■



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An 8-point buck is pictured tending to a scrape.

Photo by
Craig
Robbins



Do They Really Work?

By Craig Robbins, *The Post-Journal Outdoors Columnist*

Over the years of doing seminars regarding hunting whitetail deer, there are a handful of questions I am asked on a consistent basis.

What is the best height to hang a stand? Does scent-free clothing actually work? What is the perfect deer rifle caliber? Do deer scents actually work? My answers are always the same — whatever you are comfortable with, sometimes, I don't have one, and yes, as long they are used properly.

If you want to get an argument when one or more hunters are gathered, bring up the use of deer scents. There are few that say they would never use them, while the other side wouldn't go hunting without them and then there are the folks in the middle.

Understanding how deer communicate amongst themselves can help shed more light — or darkness, depending how one looks at it.

A deer has a huge nose and it is used as its primary defense. Smelling what is around them, a deer will sense danger, food or a potential mate. To me and many like-minded sportsmen this means that we needed to learn more about a deer's nose.

In the years since I took to the woods in search of wily whitetail deer, I have been overwhelmed with the need to understand how deer communicate. This lifelong journey has also led me to develop my own scent line and call com-

pany. With that being said, I have also been able to be in the industry when studies and tests prove one's point one way or the other.

Most hunters misinterpret what a deer scent/lure is designed to do. The role of a deer lure is to attract deer from a reasonable distance to a scrape, mock scrape, dripper, or to cause them to follow a scent trail you have laid. When applied properly the lure will aid in positioning the deer for you to place a clean shot. Don't think that just because you are using lure that the buck of a lifetime will appear.

Many hunters think that using scent is magic in a bottle. This is not true, nor will it ever be. Deer lure is only one piece of the puzzle. You must make all parts come together to be successful. You must be able to read deer signs such as trails, scrapes, rubs, bedding and feeding areas. Plus be able to use the wind to your advantage. You have to do your "homework." Scouting your particular area without leaving human odor is very important. Also, omitting human odor from your body and clothing is important.

Several weeks before the hunting season I have been scouting and hanging my tree stands. Always remember when you hang your stands in summer, it's the same direction that you will be hunting in the fall. Try to lay a scent trail in a parallel course in front of your location. This gives you a broadside shot.

When I get about 50 yards from my stand location, I start laying a scent trail while wearing rubber gloves. While bow hunting, I will lay a scent trail about 20 yards from the base of my tree stand, making a complete circle around the tree.

I'm also extra careful not to touch anything. When this is done, I hang the drag in an open spot about three feet from the ground. I then hang one film canister on a limb filled with scent, making sure these are placed in an open area and preferably in front of me.

Do not over blow your grunter, because deer are not that vocal during the early part of the season. It is not natural to use too many scents in an area, plus, never leave your canister unattended. Never apply to your clothing or boot soles. Use a Ziplock plastic bag to store the canister and drag when not in use. After using, simply refresh your canister by adding two or three drops of scent for your next hunt.

Another question widely asked is "if you have scent left over from the previous season, is it any good?" It all depends where you have stored the scent. If it was kept in cool, dark storage, such as a basement or cellar, it would be okay. If there is an ammonia odor, remove the cap and let the container breathe for a couple of hours. Usually it will dissipate. Never freeze scents, as this will weaken the smell and strength. Now I know there are companies on the market that use frozen scents as a marketing tool. Again, going back to the "keep it simple, stupid" method of hunting, understanding the game we are chasing. The average body temperature

of a whitetail deer is around 101 degrees,

Again, I am no biologist but 101 degrees is a far cry from freezing, and much of the urine has broken down in the process of freezing and thawing. We have discovered and work with 100 natural and real deer urines. My thought has always been why add to what is deer-made when we are trying to beat one of the best senses — a deer's sense of smell — walking the planet.

Over the years of hunting and guiding deer, I have noticed deer rely on their senses to survive. To be successful we all must understand the following points.

Deer have a radar nose. They have hundreds of millions of receptor sites inside their nose. We humans, on the average, have five million receptor sites. Receptor sites are nerve cells that are exposed to the outside air.

Their eyesight is keen on moving objects. I have noticed if you stand next to something, or stand out in the open and don't move, they hardly ever pick you up. A deer's hearing is a thousand times better than the average human.

Usually velvet shedding begins here around mid-September. This process takes a matter of 15 minutes once they start rubbing. They eat the velvet as they rub it off. Once the velvet is gone a buck is capable of breeding.

The majority of the does start to come into estrus into the last part of October and will continue for 10 days, give or take. When watching deer to come into estrus there are two basic signs to watch for; their tail will be standing out, sort of slanted, and she will urinate frequently, but will just do some dripping.

The rubbing of the hind legs on their tarsal glands, both buck and doe will do this, is hereditary, as I have watched fawns do this at three days of age. It is a normal instinct.

Talking with hunters, some of them tell me they are hunting a big buck because they have seen his hoof prints in the mud. The sight of a big track with doe claws visible along with the several other factors, like hoof being rounded at the tip or distance between each track, is a good sign of mature/big deer.

It is very hard for the average hunter to tell the difference in deer track. The glands on a deer can really benefit you in hunting, if you know which one to use. The tarsal gland on the inside of the hind legs are very pungent smelling if they are harvested in the fall of the year. Remove these glands from the deer you have taken. Keep them in a plastic Ziplock bag until you are ready to use them. Some folks actually keep them frozen and use them during the estrus circle of the rut. We prefer to just use tarsal gland scent. While it's as common as other scents it can be found.

Does can be in estrus 24 hours. Does this mean that we should only use estrus scent for just 24 hours? Heck no, not all does come into estrus at the same time. But using estrus before the end of October is just wasting some really good scent.

With this knowledge you can begin to formulate a time table and hunting plan. Of course this all depends on many things are done, of which none are more important than buck-to-doe ratio, but followed closely by weather, moon phase, length of the season in the area you are hunting, your personal hunting availability, just to name a few.

When you are using scent/lure, you have to use woodsmanship and deer savvy to read the signs you are seeing. Many hunters think that just pouring some scent on the ground, or spraying some in the air is magic in a bottle.

In order to be successful using pure deer scent, whether as a curiosity or sex attractant, there are special guidelines to follow. One who is desirous of using lures must first understand what the lure is basically designed to do.

I am convinced that using only pure urines are the most effective aid when dealing with the deer's sense of smell. Additives and chemicals spell disaster when it comes to attempting to get a deer in range with the use of scents.

All the fresh scent in the world won't help you if you don't mask your own scent. Preparation in reducing human scent is the number one rule when using scents.

The worst situation is the one where the deer associates human scents with the lure. This is not good. Here are a few things that we can do to help mask human scent.

Use a scent-free soap, which destroys human scent for your hair and body. Use a scent-free soap to wash all your clothing. Use some type of cover scent that is natural to the area you are hunting. This may sound silly, but use a cover scent that matches the area you are currently hunting. If you're hunting over a cut corn field, use corn scent; deep woods pine area, use pine scent; in a swampy area just reach down and grab some mud and put it on your boots and clothing.

I have seen over the years, hunters really messing up a good stand when using the improper cover scent.

Always remember the critters we are hunting live in their environment 24 hours a day, seven days a week, 365 days a year. We are just visiting. Don't do anything that will send off an already animal whose main concern is survival each day, by doing something out of the norm. Keep in the back of your mind this fact, a whitetail deer noise is 1,000 times more sensitive than yours.

Being smart and thinking like a deer will do more to help you fill your tags this fall than a new piece of equipment or widget that just hit the market place.

Best of luck this season and remember to be safe out there.■

OPEN SEASON



A hunter is pictured after a successful hunt.

Photo by Craig Robbins

Are You in Deer?

By Craig Robbins, *The Post-Journal Outdoors Columnist*

22 October 2021

In today's world, hunters have more tools to work with to help us become a better hunter.

With a wide array of scouting tools available, it's easy to become what I call a lazy boy scouter.

From computerized topographical maps to GPS to phone apps, today's hunters can really fine-tune their hunting game plans. But there is still nothing better than good, old-fashioned, get-out-of-the-house leg work.

Over the years I have uncovered a wealth of information and knowledge about a hunting area while following blood trails. The new technology is good but nothing can replace boots on the ground.

Once an animal is hit, they generally head toward their safe area. This could be bedding or core areas where they spend the majority of the time. It's where they let their guard down. It's where they feel safe.

Now, before we all run out and go beating the brush, remember weather changes will to put deer in their fall mode a little early and we can't push them too hard.

With mast crops beginning to drop, the way deer travel and trails they use will be alerted. I am not sure if that is true every year, but if the past several years are a gauge, it can be true.

Whitetail hunters over the years used various offers of scouting. Pre-season scouting has gone into the high tech with digital cameras that take photos of game in the area where the camera is placed to do old-fashioned leg work. Of course, I still prefer the old tried and true ways of scouting with topographical maps and leg work, but we do use trail cameras to fine-tune deer travel patterns and to see just what is strolling around my set-ups when I am not there. To be successful day in and day out, a hunter must do his homework throughout the year.

It looks like this year should be a good one for setting up on food sources. From what I have seen, our main areas are filled with acorns and wild apples. On the downside, the hot summer we experienced this year altered their cutting.

Don't let this stop from setting up close to these food sources.

It seems no matter where one looks in the woods, there is plenty of deer sign. The key is knowing where to set up a stand and knowing when to use it.

You can have the straightest arrows, the sharpest broadheads, the finest camo, the most secure and safest tree stand and be able to hit a quarter at 2- yards with your state-of-the-art bow, but if the deer are not where you are, then all is for naught. Picking out a stand location is a personal thing. I have hunted with guys that will not place a stand

less than 15 feet off the ground, I have also seen hunters who do not want to be more than 10 feet off the ground. Some hunters will only hunt out of particular kinds of trees. Others will only hunt over corn or alpha fields, yet others look for mast crops to hunt over.

All of these set-ups work great during certain times of the season. Being bull-headed to a given idea isn't going to fill your tags. If anything I say does not sink in, hear me on this, be a flexible hunter. Move to where the deer are moving. If for some reason deer are moving on the other side of the field of stand of pines, move to where the deer are.

Pre-season scouting should be just as much part of hunt as shooting your bow. There is no article or video on the market that is going to give you first-hand knowledge of your hunting area. The only way to get that knowledge is to get off your couch and walk the woods.

I have long said that while I scout, I carry a notebook. This book is my bible, then I transfer the information to my computer. I always check it before I set foot in the woods. In this little black book I keep records such as wind direction, stand location, scrape lines, mast crop, success in the past and daily reports. I strongly suggest that any and all serious hunters keep a hunting journal.

The older I get, the more important this black hunting bible is. In years past, my journal has helped me remember many important facts that I would have forgotten.

No matter where you set up, make sure to check the wind. Nothing will mess up a stand more than if a deer gets wind of you. That can happen while on stand or when you walk to and from your stand. Always wear scent-free clothing and "barn" style boots. The difference high boots make is unbelievable.

Moving around during archery season, a successful hunter should have a bunch of stands out or areas where you can put a stand without much trouble.

One of the most asked questions I get is, "how long or how many times do I sit in a stand." I never put my clients or myself on a stand that has been hunted for a full hunted day. If I hunt a stand in the afternoon, I will hunt it the next morning. Never, ever will I hunt it after two such sittings. We'll let that stand rest for four or five days before I ever think about hunting that same stand again. This rule never gets broken. Past experience has taught me hunters will see more deer during the first sitting then another time.

There are many things that run through our mind when we are climbing a tree, wind, equipment, scent control and much more. The most important thing that we must never forget is safety. Use a four point climbing/safety system each time you go to the trees. ■

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OPEN SEASON



The right clothes helped keep this young hunter both warm and safe while in the woods.

Photo by Gene Pauczek

Dress For Success

By Gene Pauczek, , *Dunkirk OBSERVER Outdoor Columnist*

Dress for success!

That mantra applies to the outdoors as well as in the business world. Here are some tips on how to get started.

Over the years, I have found that women, housewives and parents are the audience/readers of many of these newspaper articles. How do I know? I also read and listen to what people say.

Most of the time, when someone calls in about a successful deer hunt or fishing story, it is because their mother/wife/grandparent suggested calling or actually did the dialing.

I can't remember who made the exact quote, but it was once said that behind each great man there is a woman who helped him get to that destination.

Let's get back to the dressing for success. If you are going to spend any amount of time out doors, you need to dress for the weather. In Western New York the weather can change almost instantly, so you need to be prepared.

Big game hunting is the most popular hunting sport in New York and archery season starts in October. The first few weeks of October are often warm, windy and will experience periods of precipitation.

What do you do?

Dress in layers. Mornings tend to be cool with a lot of moisture on the ground from dew. Foot wear should be water proof and stockings should be calf-high, dry and able to wick away sweat and excess moisture. Wear long pants. Not only for comfort, but to protect against insect bites, prickly underbrush and laying down excess human scent. Next would be a long sleeve camo shirt with a short sleeve camo shirt on top. A light weight camo jacket or poncho complete with gloves and a ball cap preferably camo.

Do not wear white, yellow , or shades of blue. A light weight back back will help carry your gear like a knife, flash light, field dressing kit, wet proof matches or lighter, Zip lock plastic bag(s), ammo, compass, game calls, binoculars, bandanna, sandwich or energy drink/bar, toilet paper and fruit.

As the weather gets cooler, you can swap out the lightweight outerwear for warmer clothing. Again, clothing in layers will also apply. Save the heavy bulky outer wear for cold weather and all-day hunts.

Avoid cotton clothing. Cotton will make you sweat. Once you sweat and start to cool down, you will get cold and shiver and become

miserable. Read the label. Look for breathable micro fibers that wick away moisture. Avoid noisy materials. Fleece-type fabrics are soft, do not reflect or shine, and will enable the wearer to move through the brush quietly.

As firearm season approaches, you can wear your camo gear and still reach your safety requirements by wearing a hunter orange or fluorescent pink hat/cap gloves and safety vest.

These highly visible clothing items will improve safety but do not replace the number one rule of safety of making sure of your target, and what is beyond. This year hunting hours have changed to include a half hour before and after legal sunrise and sunset. The fluorescent material will become more visible at low light.

Note that wearing high visibility articles of clothing while ice fishing or fishing off shore are also a good idea. As the weather gets colder with snow on the ground, it is also a good idea to carry extra dry socks and gloves and a knit pull over cap. Two lock back knives probably weigh less than a big bowie/rambo style knife and provide a back up if you lose your one and only. Don't forget a pen or sharpie to sign your deer tag.

Make sure you pack out any trash you might have brought. The longer you hunt, the more gear you will accumulate. Trial and error will help with the elimination process. Watch for end of the year sales to add to your outdoor wardrobe and yard sales and estate sales will help your wallet. Have fun, hunt safe. The more comfortable you feel, the longer you will stay out, thereby increasing your odds for success.

Gene Pauszek is an outdoor columnist for the OBSERVER. He is 70 years old and has been writing for over 30 years. ■





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Chronic Wasting Disease Management Area 5

(DMA 5) – Warren County

By Lee Oaks

DMA 5 was established in 2021 after chronic wasting disease (CWD) was detected in a captive facility in Warren County. Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture oversaw depopulation of the facility, while the Game Commission introduced restrictions and enhanced disease testing in DMA 5.

CWD 101

Chronic Wasting Disease is a fatal disease that affects deer, elk, caribou, and moose. The disease was first detected in Colorado in 1967. In 2002, it was first detected east of the Mississippi River in Wisconsin. Since then, the disease has spread across much of North America, including Pennsylvania in 2012.

CWD is in the same family of disease as scrapie in sheep, mad cow disease in cattle, and Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease in humans. In deer, CWD prions create sponge-like holes in the brain that eventually lead to death.

CWD transmission can occur through direct animal-to-animal contact as well as indirectly through the environment. CWD-infected individuals spread the disease through saliva, urine, and feces; and infected carcasses contribute to environmental contamination. CWD prions may remain infectious in soil for years, which means managing the disease is a long-term endeavor.

CWD-infected animals may not show signs of the disease for up to 2 years. During this period, animals look and act normal but are infectious and spreading the disease. Signs an animal is in the advanced stages of the disease include lowered head, lowered ears, progressive weight loss, rough hair coat, excessive salivation, and other behavioral changes.

People regularly encounter deer and consume venison in Pennsylvania.

Although evidence does not exist showing transmission of CWD to humans, there are examples where prion diseases can move beyond their initial host species.

The Centers for Disease Control (CDC) reports that “Additional studies are under way to identify if any prion diseases could be occurring at a higher rate in people who are at increased risk for contact with potentially CWD-infected deer or elk meat. Because of the long time it takes before any symptoms of disease appear, scientists expect the study to take many years before they will determine what the risk, if any, of CWD is to people.”

The Game Commission, created to safeguard public wildlife resources, is responsible for taking steps to manage CWD. Responding to wildlife diseases is one of the Game Commission’s most important roles. The Game Commission’s management actions are informed by the best available science combined with public input. Unfortunately, these necessary actions may negatively impact or disrupt some people’s experiences with deer in areas where CWD has been found.

What Hunters should know about CWD

Hunters play a unique and important role in management actions. By simply hunting and harvesting deer, hunters participate in CWD management. Because of this, hunters need to be aware of CWD, where it is found, and what regulations apply.

There are currently 5 active Disease Management Areas (DMAs) and 1 Established Area (EA) in Pennsylvania.

Within DMAs and EAs:

- It is illegal to feed deer
- It is illegal to use or possess cervid urine-based attractants in an outdoor setting
- It is illegal to transport high-risk cervid parts out of the DMA or EA

These measures are in place to prevent human-assisted spread of CWD.

Do Not Move High Risk Parts

High risk parts from any deer or elk harvested, taken, or killed, including by vehicular accident cannot be removed or exported from any DMA or designated EA within the Commonwealth nor can they be imported from any state or province outside of Pennsylvania.

High-risk parts include: the head (including brain, tonsils, eyes and any lymph nodes); spinal cord/backbone; spleen; skull plate with attached antlers, if visible brain or spinal cord tissue is present; cape, if visible brain or spinal cord tissue is present; upper canine teeth, if root structure or other soft tissue is present; any object or article containing visible brain or spinal cord tissue; unfinished taxidermy mounts; and brain-tanned hides.

The following cervid parts may be safely transported into and within Pennsylvania: meat with no part of the spinal column or head attached; cleaned hides without the head; skull plates and/or antlers cleaned of all brain tissue; upper canine teeth without soft tissue; or finished taxidermy mounts. These parts may be moved out of Pennsylvania's DMAs or the EA.

Expanded Hunting Opportunities

For the 2021-22 hunting seasons, the Game Commission is offering Deer Management Assistance Program (DMAP) permits in a portion of DMA 5. The purpose of this DMAP Unit is to increase harvest and CWD surveillance in a portion of DMA5. DMAP permits are available online or from hunting license issuing agents. Hunters should ask for DMAP permits for DMAP Unit #4464.

Successful hunters can submit the deer's head in head collection bins for free CWD testing within DMA 5. Locations of head collection bins can be found at <http://bit.ly/PGC-CWDMap>.

Getting Your Deer Tested

If you harvest a deer in a DMA, please deposit the deer's head, with your completed harvest tag affixed to the deer's ear, at one of the Game Commission's head collection bins. You will be notified when your sample has been submitted to the lab with instructions of how to look up test results. Results

are generally available 2 weeks after samples have been submitted to the lab, but testing may take longer depending on the volume of samples the lab receives.

Find Your Test Results

CWD test results can be obtained online, by phone, or by email:

- Online: <https://pgcdatacollection.pa.gov/CWDResultsLookup>
- Phone: 1-833-INFO-CWD
- Email: infocwd@pa.gov

Hunters will need to provide their CID and date of birth to obtain CWD results for their deer. If CWD is detected in your deer, the Game Commission will send a letter notifying you and providing additional information.

What to do if you see a sick deer while hunting

If you encounter a visibly sick deer while hunting and have the opportunity and license to harvest it, please do so. Then contact the Game Commission region office to surrender the entire deer for testing and to receive a replacement harvest tag. ■

FOR THE LATEST INFORMATION AND INTERACTIVE MAP PLEASE VISIT WWW.PGC.PA.GOV/CWD

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OPEN SEASON



Fire Department Relies on Sportsmen Show

By Vance Hess

Started in 1888, the Little Valley fire department is one of the oldest departments in the area and is in the county seat for Cattaraugus County. Little Valley Fire Department currently operates out of one fire station and covers about 52 square miles. The apparatus include one engine (LV1), one pumper/ tanker (LV5), one crash truck (LV4), an ALS ambulance (LV8), and one 6 wheeler. The district also contracts with the Town of Mansfield for ambulance and fire protection. About half of the Town of Napoli is contracted for ambulance and fire protection. The membership is professionally staffed by approximately 35 members and is still one of the few in the area that do not have a paid EMS service. The department is toned out for (called for duty) to an average 450 calls per year.

The department relies on fund raisers to cover any gaps that may come up in the budget. There is the Fireman's Food Stand during the Cattaraugus County Fair that many fair goers look forward to visiting for our Curly Fries. During the covid pandemic we had to struggle, as many other departments did, to try and still raise funds. We started it by holding a drive-thru chicken bbq. But our tried and true fund raiser for many years has always been our bi-annual Sportsmen Show. Started in 1991, yes 30 years ago, the department started a trend that many have followed to raise funds. The beginning for the show was small and humble, it was held in our fire hall and had about 30 tables.

Jim and Pat Miller, who have made the show what it is today, had a vision and knew that the show could grow and needed a bigger venue. Our hall was limited, but the Cattaraugus County Fairground buildings had the potential to grow our show to over 150 tables that we enjoy today. Even with the larger venue, we are limited to how many vendors we can set up for inside, and there has been a waiting list for those wanting to get in. Though Jim and Pat have enjoyed the show for all those years, they have decided it was time to pass the torch. After careful consideration, they have entrusted Vance Hess and Glenn Williams, both active members in the fire department, to carry on the tradition of a great show. Over the years the show has seen generation to generation and thousands of sportsmen, and sportswomen, come through our doors.

Our show is held in 2 buildings that are connected by an outside walkway. The vendors that attend the show are from all over WNY and some have come from over 150 miles just to attend our show. There is plenty of free parking, refreshments available, and the local pistol clerks are in attendance. We work closely with the NYS Attorney General office, whom visits our show, to ensure all NICS checks and rules are strictly enforced. Anyone that knows sportsmen shows, has talked about and has probably attended our shows.

It has been a long year and a half having to cancel 4 shows due to the pandemic, so we are hoping that we can get the word out and make this a show to remember. ■

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