

# SPRING CREEK OUTDOORS

## Quarterly Newsletter

### Important Dates

#### MLDP Season Dates:

##### Harvest Option

Antlerless: Oct. 3-Feb. 28

Bucks: Oct. 3-Nov. 6

Bucks with at least one unbranched antler may be taken with firearms; any other buck may be taken with archery equipment

- Nov. 7-Feb. 28

Any buck may be taken by any legal means

##### Conservation Option

Oct. 3-Feb. 28

#### Dove Season:

-North: Sept. 1- Nov. 12  
Dec. 18-Jan. 3

-Central: Sept. 1-Nov. 1  
Dec. 18-Jan. 24

-South: Sept. 14-Nov. 1  
Dec. 18-Jan. 23

#### Quail Season:

Oct. 31-Feb. 28

### WHICH DEER DO I HARVEST THIS FALL?

Hunters are faced with this dilemma each time a group of deer present themselves for harvest. This article is to help you answer this question once and for all for the 2020-21 season. First, we need to establish a set of ground rules. A deer management plan, not just a lease contract, needs to be specifically addressed and



organized. What specifically are your goals and objectives, other than to shoot a nice buck? Do you want to see plenty of deer or simply the best deer you can? There is a huge difference here, so be careful how you answer. Also, how dedicated are you at achieving your stated goals and objectives? This is not a trick question, but one of sincerity and honesty. If you have a one year lease, are you willing and able to pass up that young buck? What if you own the land or have a long-term lease? Now we are getting somewhere.

If you have a long-term lease or own the land, why not raise the best deer you possibly can? I realize there are those who simply want meat to eat—and we will address that too—so be patient!

OK, let's assume you have a long-term hunting arrangement on this piece of heaven so let's get started managing it. First, you need a survey method that is fair and representative of the terrain and habitat. Once the survey is selected and the actual data is in hand, look at

what can be taken from the property in order to make it better. If you only have six bucks and one hundred does, shooting bucks is not an issue so forget it for this season. Female management is the need for this property and once that issue is controlled, then, and only then, will we address the bucks. Harvesting bucks on this property is only adding to the problem and certainly not helping it.

If, on the other hand, you have thirty bucks and fifty does, now we can manage both sides of the population. If you want to see lots of deer with little concern for quality, simply harvest about 25-30% of BOTH sexes and go on down the road. In this situation, you basically remove the recruitment for that current year and the population and ratios stay static, ensuring a constant population each year.

If, though, you have this same ratio and you are concerned about quality, we will need to delve deeper. A deer hunter, very generally speaking, wants to shoot the largest buck possible on the ranch. A manager, however, wants to shoot the sorriest buck on the property and leave the biggest buck for breeding. Hey, don't throw rocks at me, I am a deer hunter too, you know!

So, we inventory the buck segment and carefully select the WORST bucks from each age class for harvest. Trophy buck harvest is very light and only the oldest quality bucks are removed, none of the best quality young bucks are removed. Of the female segment to be harvested, select the oldest female possible, ensuring the younger females are the offspring of the better-managed segment of the buck population and therefore assumed to be from better genetics than the older does.

Now, there are issues with bowhunters and Managed Lands Deer Permit (MLDP) holders when selecting a mature female with fawns present to harvest so early in the season. The answer here is DON'T, not yet anyway. Basically, a fawn is weanable once it loses the spots. That means basically that it will not starve to death if the mother is removed. So, don't harvest a mature female with spotted fawns. Keep her for harvest later in the season, once the fawns are self-supporting (about Thanksgiving to be safe). So, first priority for female harvesting is any mature female without a fawn present or obvious milk bag. Removing as many mature unproductive females early in the season will create more and better habitat for the remaining deer, tighten up the adult sex ratio, improve future fawn survival rates, and lessen the chance of accidentally removing a buck fawn later in the season. People that elect to wait late in the season to complete their surplus antlerless harvest are not realizing the full benefits of their management. They also usually harvest far too many buck fawns since the little bucks closely resemble a middle-aged doe, are usually alone, and are the first to come to the feeder or food plot.

Based on the idea that you want to manage the resource, no matter the length of your lease or your ownership status, here are my buck harvest recommendations for this fall:

**Yearling bucks:** There are a lot of yearling bucks out there this year, however, roughly half of them have spikes this year. The hot summer months, combined with the livestock that were carried on the landscape longer than normal, have caused some ranches to have stressed habitat. A yearling buck is the lowest animal on the dominance totem pole so he likely had little to no access to feeders or the better quality habitat. If roughly half of your yearlings are spikes this year, do not shoot spikes or you will remove too many bucks simply because of stress and reduced nutrition. If he is truly a poor genetic buck (and they are few and far between actually) we can catch up with him next year.

**Two and three year old bucks:** harvest bucks with six or less total points and leave the eight-plus points along to grow up and make you proud. If this cohort happens to be missing one or both brow tines, take him out.

**Four year old bucks:** harvest any buck with eight or less points unless he has some great redeeming quality and you want to see more big eight points. Some folks like huge-framed eight points, but rarely will they score very high. I would take the eight or less points out and move closer to better genetic gains quicker.

**Five years and older bucks:** At this age, most hunters will recognize this buck as fully mature. For genetic gains and optimum management effectiveness, and if two five-year-olds are standing side by side and one





has eight points and the other ten, you should shoot the eight point and allow the ten to breed another day. This is where the deer hunter and deer manager diverge. This is where your management and dedication shows. Which one will you shoot?

OK, meat hunters, here goes. Do not shoot, for any reason, an immature buck that does not fit in the age criteria listed above and make up the sad, old, poor and ridiculous story about needing meat to fill the freezer. You will have passed multiple older does in order to select for that one little buck, so I don't buy your story at all. If you really and truly need just meat, I can't think of a single reason why you have to shoot a buck to do it.

Again, I know this doesn't apply across the board to everyone, but I hope you see the mechanics and benefits of proper deer management by this exercise. By harvesting the biggest buck in the woods and doing nothing about controlling the does, you are NOT managing the population—except in a negative way. Do your part to improve the herd and the habitat and take responsibility for your actions by harvesting the right deer this fall. -Macy Ledbetter

## **Taxes and Wildlife**

Fall is a time for deer and doves, football and campfires. One thing that couldn't be further from most folks minds right now is taxes, but bear with me and I'll explain how taxes and wildlife can help each other.

Every piece of private property in the great state of Texas is subject to taxation. For our purposes here, we are going to talk about a ranch as the type of property. Now most landowners understand paying taxes, it's generally a hate-hate feeling on the matter. The common method for reducing the amount of tax burden is to qualify for an Open Space Appraisal, covered under Section 1-d-1 of the Texas Constitution. Now without getting too far off in the weeds this essentially means that if a property's main use is a form of agricultural practice (such as growing crops or raising goats or cattle) or is used for timber production, the property is taxed at a lower rate than it would be otherwise. This lower tax rate equals more money in the landowner's pocket, aside from the income from whatever land-use they are practicing.

Now a good number of hunters could not care less about cattle, and another fair few don't care for them at all due to the added trouble they can cause during hunting season. As a wildlife biologist I can assure you that cattle can be a great benefit to wildlife in a number of ways. When not used in moderation cattle can be a detriment to a ranch as well, but the benefits of cross fencing and rotational grazing will have to wait for another article.

While many landowners raise livestock as a source of income, a good number only keep them for the tax break. In this situation, it makes a great deal of sense to convert the taxes on a property to wildlife management, or 1-d-1w tax valuation. The shift to 1-d-1w is even, no change to the tax rate and it only requires a handful of criteria be met, most of which you are likely doing already. There are plenty of details to be discussed but the 7 criteria are: 1) supplemental feed, 2) supplemental shelter, 3) supplemental water, 4)



habitat management, 5) predator management, 6) erosion control, and 7) wildlife census counts. You must meet a minimum of 3 of these practices to qualify for 1-d-1w.

Now the reason why fall is a great time to think about this is due to the application deadline to make this shift. Deadlines can vary from county to county, but is generally around April. While the weather is cool and you are already at the ranch preparing for hunting season, or in the midst of it, now is the perfect time to start checking these off the list. For the landowner that is tired of dealing with cattle or the lease hunter who wishes the cows would stop knocking over his feeder, 1-d-1w tax valuation is a great option that can help everyone, especially the wildlife. If you have any questions about if you qualify or if you need help making the switch, check out our website at [www.springcreekoutdoors.com](http://www.springcreekoutdoors.com) or give us a call. -Matt Nuernberg

## **Chronic Wasting Disease Update: Fall of 2020**

Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD) is a disease found in whitetail deer and other members of the deer family known as Cervids—those deer-related species that are ruminants and have solid, deciduous antlers. The species impacted in our immediate area include whitetail deer, elk, red deer and sika deer and in Texas,

include mule deer. Other than the sika, red deer and elk, other deer-like species such as axis or fallow are not affected. CWD does not affect domestic livestock, feral hogs, predators, birds or people.



The disease is caused by misfolded proteins called prions found on the surface of cells in the brain. When prions misfold, become misshaped or clump together, they replicate themselves over and over causing various degrees of brain malfunctions. Mad Cow Disease, scrapies in sheep, and Alzheimer's Disease are all similar misfolded prion diseases, but all are different from CWD. Currently there is no known understanding why or how they

proteins originally become misfolded and remain that way or how to cause them to unfold. There are no vaccines or cures available at this time.

CWD was first detected in a research facility in Colorado in 1967. Texas began testing hunter-harvested deer for CWD back in 2002 but it was not until 2012 until the first case was diagnosed in Texas in free range mule deer in west Texas. The first case of whitetail deer occurred in 2015 in a captive deer herd in Medina County (north of Hondo). Texas Animal Health Commission, along with Texas Parks and Wildlife Department, created strict live animal movement restrictions as well as hunter-harvested deer testing requirements in order to better track and monitor the disease. Since 2002, more than 82,000 tests have been performed with 180 positive results statewide to include elk, red deer, mule deer and whitetail. In 2019, nearly 13,000 susceptible species in Texas were tested and 20 have been confirmed positive. An additional 20 have tested positive from samples collected during the 2019-20 harvest season but results were not returned until February/March 2020. The latest positive cases were discovered in Kimble County, east of Junction, in a captive held whitetail herd. That captive herd has since been eliminated and testing in the immediate area of other harvested deer will continue.



Neighboring states have restricted the importation of whole or quartered carcasses from Texas. If you hunt in Texas but reside in another state, you must familiarize yourself with your resident state's carcass importation rules. Deboned meat is permitted but certain body parts such as brain, spinal cord and certain bone material are not allowed to be transported across state lines. There have been no known cases of Chronic Wasting Disease in humans but because the disease can be spread from animal to animal and hunting is a \$2.3 BILLION dollar industry in Texas, caution is needed to limit any potential spread and for monitoring to continue. -Wade Ledbetter

### **Spring Creek Outdoors Plant ID Video Series**

This past summer we filmed the beginning of our Plant Identification series. Everyone understands that plants are critical to having healthy populations of wildlife, but many people do not know the fine details beyond that. Some plants are better than others for forage and some may be only valuable as cover, but are nonetheless important. This video series highlights the more common browse plants across West, North, Central and South Texas, and their benefits to all types of Texas wildlife. We have 45 videos up and live now with many more on the way in the future. You can view these videos at the link below and we recommend you watch the introductory video for a full explanation of the series.

<https://springcreekoutdoors.com/videos/category/plant-identification-videos/>

### **Special Permit Deadlines and Reminders**

Deer Management Permit (DMP)-DMP capture deadlines vary depending on eco-region your ranch is located so make sure you are aware of those specific deadlines. It typically takes several weeks to process the application so be aware that only capture deadlines exist and that deer must be released from the pen, with food and water removed, 10.5 months after they are first placed in the pen.

Trap, Transport and Process Permit (TTP)- TTP applications must be submitted thirty (30) days prior to planned activities and capture may occur anytime between October 1 and March 31.

Trap, Transport, and Transplant Permit (TTT)- When submitting the TTT requests, both Trap and Release Site, the deadline is January 1 so if you intend to utilize the TTT permit this winter/spring, make sure to submit the appropriate request ahead of time. TTT captures can occur up until March 31 but only after the notifications are submitted prior to January 1 and the appropriate CWD test results are received and included as a part of the application process.

Reminder to all MLDP ranches: maintain the required Harvest Log after each deer is taken. Harvest Logs must be kept on site during the hunting season.

### **Helicopter Survey Season**

If you have not yet set your late season or post season helicopter survey date, we have limited openings available at this time. Call today to get on our calendar and get the very best helicopter survey you have ever seen.

### **LET US HEAR FROM YOU!**

As always, you can reach us through the contact form on our newly updated website and at our office phone number, (325) 623-5464. With 3 biologists on staff now, there is also a better chance of catching us on the road.

Macy Ledbetter lives in San Saba and can be reached at (361) 449-6376

Matt Nuernberg lives in Llano and can be reached at (210) 324-8904

Wade Ledbetter lives in Mason and can be reached at (361) 449-6702