



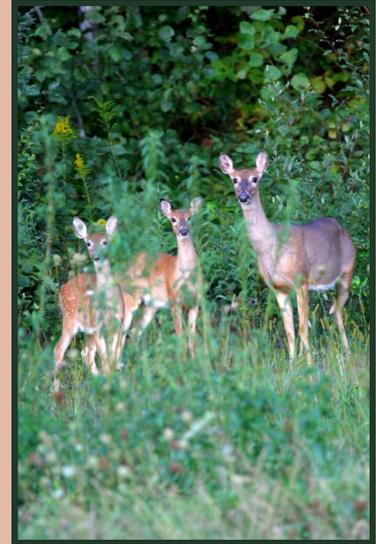
# Healthy Deer and Healthy Habitat

Understanding the connection and finding a solution with DMAP

## Deer love forests, but do forests love deer?

Deer are closely associated with forest habitat. However, in some cases they can contribute to declines in forest quality, which in turn creates stresses for the deer themselves by reducing the availability of optimal browse and cover. When free from hunting pressure, deer herds can rapidly expand. However, not all forest plants are equally preferred by deer, and not all are available year-round. Competition for preferred food among individuals can lead to overbrowsing, which prevents tree seedlings from establishing, modifies plant communities and can even exclude other wildlife species from the area. Even though the forest trees may still persist, the actual habitat may no longer support a healthy deer herd. This may mean that the remaining deer are in poor body condition, produce smaller antlers, produce fewer fawns and are more susceptible to disease and predators. The reduced availability of forage also means that these habitats may no longer support as many deer.

On the other hand, finding the balance between healthy deer and healthy habitat will contribute to the overall appearance and vitality of the deer herd. Woodlands can be managed to promote the new growth of aspen, oak and other vegetation preferred by wildlife. Maintaining a balanced deer herd can alleviate minimize the browsing pressure on forest plants, allowing them to benefit deer and other wildlife for a longer period of time. Managing habitat and deer at the same time can yield improvements to both forest composition and deer herd health—and DMAP can help you get started.



Healthy habitats produce healthy deer. Healthy forests usually include several layers of trees and shrubs, diverse types of mast-producing plants and trees (including oak, hickory, raspberry and apple), and habitat variety (such as forest openings, dense conifer cover or a small creek). DMAP aims to help you:

- 1) define your goals;
- 2) identify what habitat features you already have;
- 3) improve and/or create habitat for wildlife on your land; and
- 4) measure your success through data collection.



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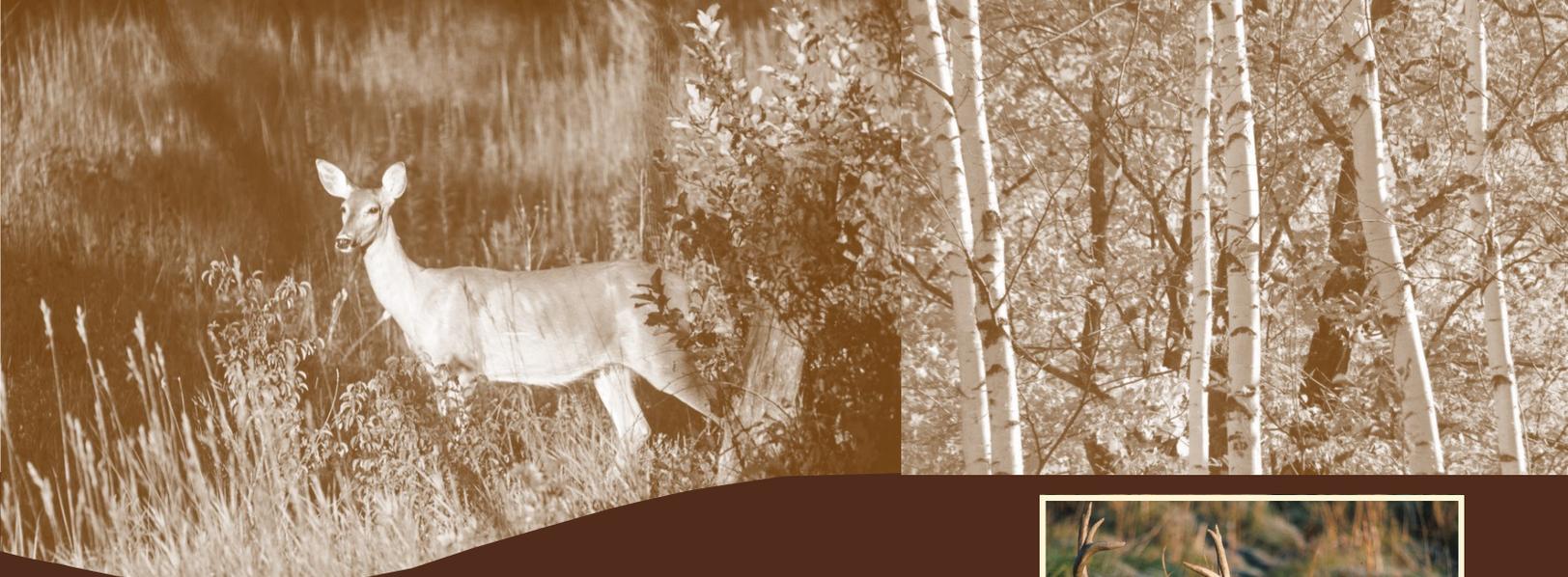


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# Healthy Deer Management

Did you know that antler size can be a measure of overall health in white-tailed deer? In fact, antler size can actually be reduced when deer numbers exceed what the habitat can support. DMAP does not focus solely on antler size, but rather addresses the larger issue of herd health—namely, producing does, bucks and fawns that are strong and healthy. Deer in better condition can put more energy and resources toward antler growth and reproduction. This means that you get to see more deer that appear healthier overall. And of course it won't hurt if some of them are nice bucks!



## How can you spot deer damage?



Stunted growth due to nipped buds and leaves



Crop damage with cut or "mown" appearance, topless vegetables and unhealthy fruits, seeds or greens



Plant growth inside an enclosure fence with poor growth of surrounding plants



Loss of the lower leaves and twigs of trees



Above: a very open, overbrowsed forest understory with few plant types and poor cover



Right: a healthy forest with a complex understory, in which deer populations are more balanced with their habitat

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## DMAP Partners

