

The Basic Precepts of Deer Management

These basic principles were compiled by listening to and reading the thoughts of many others as well as by personal observation over the past 30 years. Hundreds of ranchers, deer managers, biologists, hunters and scientists both past and present have contributed to the collection of these fundamental ideas. Compiled by Steve Nelle, Wildlife Biologist, NRCS.

I. To value and conserve the habitat that supports thy deer herd. This is the first and greatest precept.

- ❖ To keep thy herd within the carrying capacity of thy habitat. The examination of deer weights, fawn crops, antler development, and the abundance of spikes shall tell thee if thy herd size is balanced to thy habitat. Surplus animals, thou must remove.
- ❖ To learn to recognize and evaluate the herbs and bushes which thy deer use as food. Overgrazing of thy choice feeds by deer or livestock is iniquity of the worst kind, and will lead to the destruction of thy habitat and the demise of deer quality.
- ❖ To understand that deer need much brush and woods for refuge. Excessive land clearing is a transgression to be avoided.
- ❖ To understand the forces which govern the vigor of thy particular habitat and to practice those techniques which are known to maintain or increase the richness of thy habitat.

II. To apply a selective harvest to thy deer herd to make it all thy heart desires.

- ❖ To select as to the gender of deer to be harvested to attain a desirable and balanced ratio of does and bucks.
- ❖ To select as to the age of bucks to be harvested relative to thy goals. If thou long to have magnificent mature bucks in thy herd, thou must restrain thyself against the taking of desirable young bucks.
- ❖ To select as to the desirability of antlers possessed by bucks to improve future generations. To retain in thy herd, bucks with antlers thou deem superior, throughout his prime breeding years. To remove from thy herd, bucks with antlers thou deem undesirable for their age. These selections must be undertaken with utmost care, skill and restraint lest they be contrary to thy goals.
- ❖ If these selections are considered of little worth due to the small size of thy land and the large wanderings of thy deer, thou should be diligent to enlist the cooperative support of thy neighbors in like-minded herd management. If thy neighbors refuse cooperation, thou may have no choice but to erect a barrier suitable to manage thy herd prudently.

III. To have an appreciation and respect for the land, the wildlife, the tradition of hunting and other people.

- ❖ To be a keen observer of all manner of wildlife as well as a predator of a few.
- ❖ To savor the hunt regardless of the kill.
- ❖ To engage in ethical hunting practices.
- ❖ To seek not to needlessly offend the conscience of those who do not hunt.
- ❖ To respect the property and wishes of the owner and caretaker of the land.
- ❖ To submit to the statutes which regulate hunting.

IV. To do all these things thyself and to teach others to do likewise.