

Now What?

At this time of year, I get lots of inquiries about what to do at this time of year to help the wildlife. First, don't go fishing, you need to get back to the ranch and continue managing for trophy whitetails! The fish are in a barrel, they aren't going anywhere, you can catch them anytime, day or night and all year long. Deer season and growing big antlers happens in a small percentage of the available time and you have to hunt smart and hard when the time comes.

Things to do at this time of year include, but certainly are not limited to: Keep all feeders, where legal, full and operational. In the south, deer are growing antlers and fixing to have babies. In the north, deer have had babies and are still growing antlers, so nutritional stress is happening on both sexes. Do you need to test or even replace timers and batteries? Is the solar charger still working correctly? I am sure it needs cleaning and minor adjustments to catch the optimum angle of the sun. Check for squirrel and raccoon damage to the wires, spinner plate, latches and lid. Is there a huge hole under the feeder from all the hog activity? If so, either move the feeder over or fill in the hole so that feed doesn't fall in standing water when it rains. Are the legs spayed out from hogs or cattle rubbing on them? Perhaps building a large pen around the feeder or staking each leg securely to the ground is required. What about those all-important trail/scouting cameras? Batteries need replacing and they likely need cleaning and proper storage before they will be ready again this fall.

The recent rains in most states have been a real blessing for deer, but they can still use our help. With food plots, take soil samples on those areas not yet sampled, spray for grass and grassburs and even heavy/deep disc now to remove the unwanted grasses. With all the recent moisture, deep plowing is finally possible and turning the soil to remove the grass just might be needed. In more dry areas that haven't received the rains and where moisture is a limiting factor, not discing but simply spraying might be in order. How many acres are in your food plot management system now and do you need more? If so, do you need more warm or cool season forage plants and what kind is best for your area? Research your options now and get informed and prepared for the planting season ahead. Do existing food plots need fencing from the cattle or enlarged to keep the deer from wiping them out? Why not construct exclosures this fall to establish exactly how the plantings performed? Do you need to adjust your planting date or rates this fall? What worked best last fall and what can be experimented with this year?

Predator control work is important this time of year. Catch and remove feral hogs when and where possible, they depredate on everything baby-related, so take as many off the range as possible. Snaring and trapping coyote, bobcat, fox and

raccoons will help. Raccoons don't predate on deer normally, but they do impact quail and turkey nest success and they certainly dominate and disturb deer feeding stations. Live traps around watering sources baited with any smelly bait works well on most raccoons this time of year. There is a difference between predator control and predator eradication. You can't, nor don't want to, eradicate predators, but their numbers do need to be controlled.

If you haven't done so yet, tabulate the past season's harvest data to gauge your success or lack thereof. What effect, if any, did this past summer's drought have on your deer population? Does your adult sex ratio need adjusting? How is the buck age structure doing now? Did you see a positive response from your management actions? What worked best and what didn't work this past season and why?

Is it time to move deer blinds around in order to keep the deer guessing? What about the post-season scouting you did, do you need to select a new blind location due to deer movement? Set up new locations now so that the animals can get used to it and it won't be so new this hunting season. Are more water stations needed? It has rained lately in most areas, but are there large blocks of acreage on your hunting grounds that lack water? If so, now is the time to get the trough and water lines installed, drill the new well, or call in the dozer to build the new pond. Does anything need to be done about the overall condition of the habitat? How are the cattle impacting the grass component on the property? Too many cattle can reduce fawning cover and therefore fawn survival. Do you need more cross-fencing to rotate the cattle more often or do you need to simply reduce the total number of mouths on the range? Are there any areas on the property that need reclaiming or thinning to facilitate better forage production and hunting access? Does the property have enough valuable "edge effect" or do you need to create more?

How about the group of hunters and even the hunting cabin itself? There are always cabin repairs and wood to cut and stack. Are all the hunters as educated about deer management as they need to be? If not, what can you do to get them educated enough to help, and not hurt, the management program? Summertime is seminar and convention time, so encourage them to get educated and more involved with the program so that everyone benefits. Do you need to order the latest deer management books or DVDs or even calendars for the deer camp this fall? Is the fall survey already scheduled and are there any hunting vehicle repairs needed? Of course, you can always use more camo clothing and a new knife! Hey, remember that miss last fall - that easy shot that nobody could have missed? Perhaps a new scope, a new rifle, a new set of binoculars.....

See, I told you there was plenty to do in the deer woods this summer. Now, but down that fishing pole and get back to the ranch, the deer are waiting on you.