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The Deer Problem - Nation Wide

The ninth North American Wildlife Conference was held April 24-25-26, 1944, in Chicago. This is a Conference of the leading Federal, State and private Wildlife men in Canada, The United States, and Mexico. It is sponsored by the American Wildlife Institute, an independent organization.

During the general sessions certain individuals expressed their desire to have a special meeting of those interested in the management of deer herds. It was felt that by comparing experiences from various parts of the country certain basic features would develop which were characteristic of most deer herds.

After a two hour discussion the following was agreed upon. It presents the opinion of experienced game men, many of whom have nation wide recognition.

(Forerunner of Great Lakes Deer Group 1944)

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Experience With Excess Deer

The undersigned met at the Ninth North American Wildlife Conference April 26, 1944, to exchange our experiences with deer herds that have grown too large for the natural food supply. We found ourselves in agreement on the following points:

1. If excess deer are not shot off they will starve off. When a herd starves down the carrying capacity of the range goes with it.
2. A herd can be reduced effectively only by killing females. Where large refuges exist, they sometimes must be shrunk before a reduction can be made.
3. The sooner excess deer are removed, the more deer the range will carry later. Reduction should be completed before starvation begins.
4. The following experiences shed light on the degree of reduction needed:
 - (a) A 90 percent starvation on the Kaibab brought partial range recovery.
 - (b) Pennsylvania has reduced 50 percent by doe seasons, but cannot yet plant white pines. Some red pines are getting by.
 - (c) On the Dixie Forest in Utah a 50 percent reduction by shooting seems to have brought some relief, but this herd had not reached the starvation point. Other Utah herds are in process of combined shooting and starvation, but no conclusions can yet be made.
 - (d) Michigan's deer are starving down because the legislature would not authorize killing females. The extent of the reduction is unknown. Range conditions are still getting worse.
 - (e) Assuming a deer population of 500,000 Wisconsin has reduced its herd temporarily 26 percent by shooting (66,000 males and 66,000 females taken in the 1943 hunting season) without relief to the range.
 - (f) In average years annual losses of deer in overpopulated areas of Texas vary from 15% to 26%, and in dry years some herds have suffered losses up to 50%.
 - (g) In Minnesota open seasons without age or sex restrictions, in 4 of the past 6 years have failed to check the increase of deer. There have been starvation losses in some places in recent years and range deterioration is becoming evident.
5. Delay in removing excess deer deteriorates their physical vigor and predisposes to parasites and disease.

Experience With Excess Deer

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6. Predators may be useful in breaking up congestions, and in helping to control deer in inaccessible areas, which hunters cannot or do not reach. Excess deer are a problem in distribution as well as numbers.

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