

## Preventing deer damage to young trees

Research is showing that white tailed deer populations of more than 14 deer per square mile can have a harmful impact on forest health. Many areas of New York have 16 to 40 deer per square mile. This impact is commonly seen in the lack of diverse seedlings and young trees in many forests. If your forest has an open understory, chances are it is actually in a path of decline, rather than vigorous health.

Deer damage cannot be repaired easily. All forest owners should prevent and reduce deer damage to maple, ash, hickory, walnut, oak, and other seedlings. Deer have a lower preference for some species, like beech and black cherry. This means that over time, the composition of tree species in forests may shift to just a few different kinds of trees, rather than the natural diversity that existed before deer became overpopulated in New York in the last 30 years.



### **Best management practices for reducing deer damage in woodlands**

#### **Monitor for deer damage of seedlings.**

Inspect your woodlot for deformed seedlings, evidence of browse, deer trails, and excessive buck rubs. These are signs that deer are likely overpopulated and are impacting forest resources. Some forest owners have joined forces, combining adjacent acreage to develop a larger forestry cooperative to monitor deer damage.

#### **Allow access for hunting.**

Landowners who open their property for deer hunting with permission rarely incur a higher level of liability. New York's General Obligations Law (Sect. 9-103) protects landowners from recreation-based liability under a particular condition: the person is not paying you to access the property. This includes the hunters you give permission to hunt deer on your property. Because of this protection, recreational liability lawsuits against rural landowners from hunters are uncommon. If you communicate with hunters who may use your property and agree on limitations, if any, you will be taking an important step toward maintaining the regeneration capacity of your forest.

#### **Protect seedlings with fencing or fallen trees.**

Fallen trees and fencing form barriers to deer, yet allow seedlings to grow vigorously. Avoid the temptation to "clean up" the woodland floor of branches and wind throws. Ice storm damage and trees intentionally felled to protect seedlings are especially helpful in this



regard. By obstructing even small areas of deer browsing, woodlot diversity will improve. Consider a silvicultural treatment, like a seed tree cut or clear cut, to improve regeneration.

**Increase familiarity with deer control programs.**

The NYS Department of Environmental Conservation has many programs available to landowners and hunters to encourage a healthy deer population, balanced with sustainable forest regeneration. Attend public meetings about deer control to learn what is available in your area regarding doe permits, nuisance permits, quality deer management programs, and other incentives to keep deer in check.

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