

Forming Michigan Quality Deer Management (QDM) Cooperatives



What are Quality Deer Management Cooperatives?

Quality Deer Management (QDM) Cooperatives are simply groups of adjoining landowners and hunters working together to improve the quality of the deer herd and hunting experiences on their collective acreage.

How Large are Typical QDM Cooperatives?

Cooperatives vary in size and number of participants. Some are just a few hundred acres with a handful of participants, while others are many thousands of acres with hundreds of participants. Obviously, the more acreage under management the better, but any increase in acreage will increase the success of your management efforts.

Are QDM Cooperatives Voluntary or Mandatory?

Cooperatives are voluntary and in no way entitle hunters access to your property or diminish the landowner's control.

What are the Requirements for Participation in a QDM Cooperative?

The participation requirements vary with each cooperative. At a minimum, most require members to make a legitimate effort to protect yearling bucks and harvest an appropriate number of does. In all cases, the rules and penalties (if any) are determined and enforced exclusively by members of the cooperative.

Why Should you form or join a QDM Cooperative with your neighbors?

Reason # 1:

To put together enough acreage to effectively manage a local deer herd, something nearly impossible on small tracts where "your" deer spend much of their lives on neighboring properties. This allows even the smallest landowners and groups of hunters to enjoy the same benefits previously available only to large properties.

Reason # 2:

To improve the adult buck-to-doe ratio and increase the number of mature bucks. This results in a more intense rut, greatly increases the effectiveness of hunting techniques such as rattling and grunting, and increases opportunities to observe and harvest mature bucks.

Reason # 3:

To be part of a true "landscape" approach to habitat management, where food plots, travel corridors and sanctuaries can be designed to maximize deer herd quality and hunting success over a broader area.

Reason # 4:

To reduce management costs by purchasing items such as lime, fertilizer and food plot seed in bulk. Cooperatives also enable the sharing

of equipment such as tractors, and knowledge from experienced local deer managers.

Reason # 5:

To reduce trespassing and poaching by working together in a "neighborhood watch" type approach.

Reason # 6:

To share harvest and observation data to gain a better "picture" of the local deer herd. Often, the data gathered on small properties is limited and of minimal value when formulating deer management strategies.

Reason # 7:

To receive a discount on membership in QDMA and hunt club liability insurance (if necessary). Through the QDMA's Group Membership program, cooperative members are eligible to receive annual membership benefits for as little as \$15 per year (normally \$25 per year). Also, through the QDMA's Hunt Club Liability Insurance program, properties may be combined for discounted insurance, greatly reducing annual costs.

If you're interested in forming a QDM Cooperative, contact Perry Russo, QDMA Michigan Regional Director, for a Cooperative presentation and/or additional information on forming a QDM Cooperative. You may contact Perry by phone (248) 260-1923 or email: prusso@qdma.com.

For additional information on forestry practices, food plots and QDM, visit the Michigan QDMA web site at www.qdma.net or the National site at www.qdma.com.

To order the book *Wildlife Food Plots, Easy as 1•2•3* by Ed Spinazzola, send \$13.00 (check or money order only, made out to QDMA Mid-Michigan Branch) to: Wildlife Food Plots, P.O. Box 688, Rose City, MI 48654.

Support the nation's most respected, influential and fastest growing whitetail conservation organization in the nation. Become an informed deer manager and join QDMA today!

Clubs and organizations can join as a QDMA Partnership. Please call 1-800-209-DEER for more information or an application form.

Mail this completed application to:

QDMA P.O. Box 227, Watkinsville, GA 30677

Name _____

Address _____

City _____ ST _____ Zip _____

Phone _____

Email _____

Please send me:

(New 1-year members choose one, new 3-year members choose two)

B&C, P&Y Map Aging Poster Video

Membership Categories:

- \$25 per year Adult USA
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- \$15 per year Junior (Under 16) USA
- \$200 Sponsor Donation \$ _____



Remember—our 501(c)(3) status means your financial support is tax deductible. (Federal ID #57-0941892)

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Expiration Date _____

Also apply by calling: 1-800-209-DEER or visit our web site at: www.qdma.com

October's Balance

by Dave Guynn - Clemson University

As an enthusiastic hunter, I know well what it can mean to see and harvest a quality white-tailed buck. Being intimate with Lady Luck is often the determining factor, but hard work and sheer persistence are needed to consistently take good bucks. As I mature, the importance of taking such bucks has lessened, while the assurance of their presence has become paramount. My experience as a wildlife biologist has made me aware of the importance of proper harvest management. And proper herd management cannot be achieved under today's norms of shooting the first legal animal encountered or by shooting only quality bucks.

Harvest guidelines are our most important deer management tool. As such, regulations should spell out not just the number of animals to be harvested in an area, but the social classes (age and sex) of those animals as well. In formulating these regulations, we should ask if a given deer population is living well or is it suffering social misery due to imbalances in herd structure? What classes of animals should be harvested if such an imbalance exists?

Why should we concern ourselves with maintaining a natural social balance in a managed deer herd? Because, to survive as long as they have, deer long ago developed social rules or mechanisms that would keep deer herds and their individual members fit and competitive. However, when harvest regulations allow hunters to deplete certain social classes (with deer, this is usually most or all bucks 1.5 years old or older) in an unscientific, haphazard manner, the herd's social mechanisms can become stressed. This is exactly the fix we are in today. We can only guess at how many whitetails inhabited North America before the white man arrived, but the late Ernest Thompson Seton, a pioneer naturalist and author, estimated a population of about 40 million animals. We would surmise that, despite predation and hunting by Native Americans, bucks 4.5 years old and older were not uncommon. The adult sex ratio of such herds was probably in the range of 50-75 bucks per 100 does. In local areas, the rut and fawning seasons probably lasted six to eight weeks. These were healthy deer living in social balance.

The situation is much different today. Post-hunt adult sex ratios of 20 or less bucks per 100 does are the rule, and most of these bucks are 1.5 years old. Mature bucks, 4.5 years old or older, are rare and many hunters cannot even comprehend how a mature buck from their area would look. Thus, at the beginning of the rut, 80% or more of the antlered bucks are 1.5 years old. These youngsters rise to the occasion and most receptive does are eventually bred, but at a price. How do the demands of breeding inhibit the growth potential of those few bucks that survive the hunting season? Because of the social imbalance, the rut and fawning periods may last 15 weeks or longer. This places additional stress on the few surviving bucks and causes fawns to be born after the period of optimum nutrition during spring or summer.

In most situations, this predicament is the result of haphazard hunting regulations and practices that have been defined more by tradition than biological concerns. In many areas, doe harvests are inadequate while bucks are harvested at such high rates that 80% or more of the bucks taken are 1.5 years old or younger. Also, most bucks are harvested within the first few days of the season.

The root of this problem is within us, the deer hunter. Why must we take the first legal animal we see? Hunting is a personal experience that is enjoyed in solitude or with people we know. It should not be a competitive sport with the objective of seeing who can shoot the biggest or the most deer. Why not go afield to observe, enjoy, learn deer behavior and harvest those individual animals that will create the proper social balance and ensure the continued welfare of the population? We must learn to respect the long-term welfare of our deer resource and place our personal desires behind the needs of the resource.

In recent years I have become a strong proponent of the quality deer management philosophy. My hope is that men and women who are fortunate enough to have known a deer herd in social balance will value these experiences to the point that socially imbalanced herds are unacceptable from both recreational and ethical viewpoints. Informed and selfless individuals must be willing to support biologically sound management principles that may in the short term be counter to his or her personal desires, but which in the long term will

strengthen the resource.

The primary characteristic of any social system is the ranking of its members. Antler and body size are the primary factors that determine the relative rank of each buck. During the weeks preceding the rut, bucks establish social pecking order. This they accomplish primarily by posturing, sparring, and signpost behavior.

In a balanced population, mature bucks will do most of the breeding. The presence of older bucks and their signposts may suppress the competitiveness and libido of younger bucks. Lower testosterone levels should result in decreased weight loss during the rut and allow young bucks to grow to greater size before they assume breeding duties.

Under these conditions, the rut is intense and relatively brief. From the viewpoint of the hunter or deer observer, October will be a most exciting time. To experience the full drama of deer behavior, deer can be attracted by rattling antlers or mimicking the grunting of a rutting buck.

Beyond October, deer herds can exist in the social balance for which they evolved. But it will not be easy. To achieve this goal will require harvest management practices more scientific, flexible and progressive than those currently in use - practices that may never be accepted without the encouragement and support of selfless, farsighted hunters. These hunters must look not only beyond October, but beyond themselves. Their ultimate satisfaction must not come from how many deer or how large the antlers taken, but from knowing that the welfare of the deer resource is of their making.

Once established, such socially balanced herds will have high rates of reproduction and fawn survival. Long and generous hunting seasons will be required to harvest the various classes of deer that need to be removed to keep the herd size and social makeup in balance. But, first, the general ranks of hunters must be educated as to their role in deer management. Otherwise, changes in regulations regarding season length and bag limits would be to no avail.

Dr. Dave Guynn is a professor in the Department of Forestry and Natural Resources, Clemson University. He also serves on the QDMA's National Board of Directors.

Michigan Cooperative Commitment

In order to improve the hunting experiences and quality of the deer herd on our collective properties, we, the undersigned, agree to improve the buck / doe ratio and buck age structure by harvesting an adequate number of female deer and exercising restraint when it comes to harvesting young bucks. Herd evaluation and management strategies will be discussed and agreed to before each hunting season during a Cooperative meeting with all parties involved. The harvest results will be reviewed at the end of each hunting season and members will determine the proper management strategies for the following season.

We, the undersigned, agree to form a Michigan Quality Deer Management Cooperative for the _____ hunting season.

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