

## Tour Investigates

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\$4,900 last year. The Hershberger's problem increased when gypsy moths killed the oak trees in their woods where the deer once fed.

Kevin Frederick has the problem familiar to many farmers in Bedford County. Next door are 750 acres of posted grounds. "They are owned by a dentist from

Baltimore," Kevin explains. "Nice guy, and we like him. We wouldn't care how many friends he brought up here to hunt the property. Problem is, he doesn't bring enough."

The Fredericks milk 400 registered Holstein. Loss to their alfalfa crop has been estimated at 12% due to deer damage. Statistics were obtained through the efforts

of Richard Dale, extension agent, who had ten caged alfalfa plots across the county.

Farmers, like the Fredericks, are growing more sorghum. It's not as nutritious for the dairy cattle, but it doesn't whet the appetites of the deer.

Anthony Wertz' 400-acre farm is located alongside a hunter safety zone, the turnpike and a moun-

tain range. Wertz lost two of every six acres of corn planted this year. Total cost loss is estimated at \$1,305.28.

Tim Flanigan, game protector, said Wertz does do a lot of harvesting on his own. "And, he does it to the letter," Flanigan assured. "Farmers who harvest their own deer and don't report them are shooting themselves in

the foot. The Game Commission relies heavily on the harvesting report to determine the number of deer in the county. Those deer killed that are not reported reveal a false census."

Deer are causing similar damage to the woodlands, "an extensive agricultural crop in Bedford County," according to forester, Tom O'Neal.

"Deer are affecting the future of forests down the road," explained O'Neal as he led a trek up the hillside near Everett.

"When you don't see leaves three feet off the ground, a red flag goes off," said Steve Wacker, of the Bureau of Forestry.

"We should be seeing the woods floor covered with oak seedlings. We aren't. There is no next generation supply of timber. And, what most people don't realize is that timber is an important agricultural crop."

O'Neal noted that oak and hemlock seedlings are both being replaced by birch and black locust, species found not as appetizing to the deer population.

On The Rainsburg Mountain southeast of Bedford, Steve Wacker pointed to a sparse forest floor and noted that, "With all the rain, we had hoped for a good regrowth of oak seedlings this year. We don't have them."

Taxpayers get hit with a decline in state forests. All proceeds from sale of lumber in state forests goes into the state treasury. "The name of the game in oak timber is quality," explained Wacker. "And, we don't have it here."

Wacker also pointed out declines in fruits of the forest such as ginseng, azaleas, and blueberries.

Despite repeated efforts, Bedford County has failed to get the attention of the State Game Commission to increase the number of antlerless deer licenses in the county. Last year, allotment was set at 17,700. This year, the number was again lowered to 8,250.

Bedford County treasurer Bun Clark notes that all surrounding counties have been sold out of licenses for weeks.

One solution to the complex problem is to initiate a hot spot pilot program. This would allow hunters to shoot a doe in buck season provided it was in one of the hot spots.

"It doesn't help much," explains Richard Dale. "It still doesn't allow a hunter to take more than one deer."

Sixty-nine farmers have signed up for the hot-spot program. "That's not enough to please the Game Commission," continues Dale. "They say that the number of farmers signing up for the program is an indication of the deer population. Farmers, on the other hand, don't bother to sign up

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Tim Flanigan, state game protector, and Anthony Wertz, farmer, on the deer damage tour.



Mike Cessna, Bedford County conservation office, left, introduces Kevin Frederick, owner of one of the farm stops on the tour.

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