Deer Impacts on our Woods
Highlights from the Woodlot Regeneration: Strategies to Grow Trees and Limit Deer Impacts Webinar

Since the inception of the MCA, 8 years ago, deer impacts on our forest health and deer management has been a high priority for our partners, many of whom have or are pursuing active deer management programs in their communities.

Kristin attended a webinar a few weeks back that discussed the negative impacts of abundant deer on our forest regeneration (click here to watch the webinar https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SLVbqOgeeOI). Here are some of the highlights.

- For ideal northern hardwood regeneration you want ~20,000 seedlings/acre pre-harvest and ~9,000 seedlings/acre and 550 saplings/acre post harvest
- With the exception of dense shade, the limiting factors for healthy forest regeneration are heavy deer browse and interfering vegetation (non-native or aggressive native species).
- A single deer can eat ~4,200 seedling tips a day!
- In an ideal situation (no mortality and each doe gives birth annually) with a 1:1 male/female ratio deer population will increase 1900% in 7 years
- 50% of the herd would need to die annually to stabilize herd numbers

In addition to losing native vegetation that should be replacing our trees as they die, the deer (by not eating invasives) are promoting invasive species growth, in particular Japanese barberry. This means when the canopy is opened, those invasive plants in the understory will continue to increase further reducing the native plant and tree regeneration.

The residential/urban landscape of MetroWest has created the ideal edge-habitat that deer love, allowing their numbers to increase beyond the carrying capacity of our woods. Along with the negative affects on our forests high deer densities contribute to a higher incidence of deer- car collisions, a greater incidence of tick-bourne illnesses (e.g. Lyme Disease) and the deer will experience malnutrition and disease (including Chronic Wasting Disease) when browse pressure has removed their desired food source and they resort to eating vegetation they typically would not eat.