

In Person White Tailed Deer Scouting Class

Lesson Plan

Instructor Notes

This lesson introduces students to the knowledge and skills of locating and identifying deer sign. This lesson corresponds with the online Scouting for Deer Class but can also serve as a stand-alone class. It is best to conduct this class on public land open to hunting. Properties could be on municipal, state, or federal lands.

Teaching Methods Used in This Lesson

- Student hands-on activity

Suggested Time

3 Hours

Materials Required

- Printed maps of the location (optional)
- 2 instructors

Station Set-up

1. If you are unfamiliar with the scouting location, review the area using Google Earth, OnX Maps, Huntstand, MassMapper or other online scouting database.
2. If you suspect that finding deer sign in that specific location may be difficult due to low deer density, pre-scout it a few days prior to the class and GPS mark areas with deer sign to show to participants on the day of the class.
3. It is in the instructors' best interest to visit the area prior to the event to locate sign and features so you have a general idea of the travel route.

Part A:

Focus Activity (5 minutes)

The purpose of the focus activity is to get everyone focused on the lesson. Ask: "What are some types of food sources that deer would eat in the fall, can anyone name a food resource used by deer during the fall hunting season in this area?"

Part B:

Objectives (5 minutes)

State the learning objectives to the students. "At the end of this lesson, you will be able to:

- Identify basic types of deer sign including tracks, scat, beds, buck rubs, and scrapes, and browse (feeding sign)
- Identify vegetation commonly associated with deer sign (hemlock, beech) as well as trees and shrubs that provide food sources for deer.
- Describe how terrain influences deer movement.
- Identify good deer hunting spots based on deer sign and terrain.
- Describe the importance of knowing wind direction while hunting.

Part C:

Teaching Method

1. Identify, name, and point out deer sign (tracks, scat, beds, buck sign, feeding sign)
2. Identify, name, and point out browse species and other food sources (white oak, red oak, hickory, beech)
3. Discuss how terrain features influence deer movement.
4. Locate good hunting spot(s).
5. Discuss how to enter a hunting area with the wind in your favor.

Part D:

Student Exercise (2.5-3 hours)

The purpose of the student exercise is to allow participants to develop their identification skills. Focus on identifying, naming and pointing out several types of deer sign, including potential food sources and discuss how these elements along with understanding terrain play a vital role in helping the hunter successfully target whitetail deer on a particular piece of property. Instructors should focus their time engaging the students. Ask them questions relative to the sign you're looking at. Once identified, encourage students to locate more sign. Continually remind them to ask questions. Be positive and courteous and cultivate a welcoming environment for questions.

- A. Introductions: Allow students to share their name and hunting experience with the group to foster a community environment.
- B. Explain the overall path that the class will be walking as well as designated areas to meet if anyone becomes separated from the group. If available, distribute maps of the area.
- C. Lead the students towards the scouting focus area (predetermined area to walk and point out sign) while making sure to answer any general questions the students may have along the way.
- D. Throughout the walk, take time to point out examples and work through scenarios for the following topics. Use the outline below:

1. Identify deer sign (tracks, scat, beds, buck sign, feeding sign).

- Lead the students towards areas where deer tracks may be found such as stream crossings or loose, sandy soils. Demonstrate how to estimate the age of tracks by comparing them to freshly made mock tracks. Point out differences in track sizes and how this can be used to identify age and sex of deer in the area.
- Ask the students to point out any piles of deer scat while on the walk. Explain that deer scat size and shape (clumping vs pellets) isn't indicative of deer size or sex. Show the students the difference between fresh and old deer scat if possible.
- Show the students examples of deer beds. If the instructors can't locate any beds, point out terrain features and cover that would be conducive to deer bedding.
- Point out any buck rubs or scrapes during the walk. Explain to the students how both are made and how they are used as a form of communication. Ask the students "How would buck sign influence where you choose to hunt?"
- Identify deer feeding areas and explain how to determine how old this sign may be. Differentiate between ground feeding and browse of woody vegetation.

2. Identify browse and other food sources (white oak, red oak, hickory, beech).

- Instructors should show the students common deer forage with respect to their geographic location. This section should focus on hard mast and food sources that deer will target in the fall.
- Show students how to identify trees that produce hard mast such as oak, hickory and beech through leaf identification as well as tree bark appearance.
- If available, show students woody vegetation that has been browsed by deer.

3. How terrain features influence deer movement.

- Explain to students how deer will typically take the path of least resistance and will therefore traverse elevation changes in predictable ways.
- Discuss how spines, ridges and gulleys can funnel deer and how these terrain features come into play when selecting a good hunting spot.
- In areas where elevation changes are more subtle, discuss how deer tend to travel on slightly higher elevation even if the change in elevation is 1-2' higher (example: dry ground found in swampy or marshy areas)

4. Selecting hunting spot.

- Show students how to select a spot that will provide shot opportunities to known deer travel routes. Explain how shot distance and hunting implements play into this.

5. How to play the wind when entering the woods.

- Using available deer sign, pick a potential hunting spot and mockup a scenario about how the students should approach the location with a given wind direction.
- Also cover where to park as well as enter the woods based on potential wind directions.
- Explain to the students how to use existing hiking trails to quietly access an area.

Part E:

Student Summary/Wrap up (15-30 minutes)

Depending on the distance from the parking lot, plan to begin exiting the field so that instructors can do a final wrap up with 5-10 minutes left in the lot. Encourage all students to ask all last-minute questions relative to scouting and deer hunting.