



PINEYWOODS POST

*A publication of the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department
for landowners and outdoor enthusiasts of the Pineywoods.*

Summer 2011

It's summer again in Texas!

As your thoughts turn to the lake or having that barbeque in the backyard, don't forget about your furred and feathered friends. There is still lots that you can do during the summer to benefit wildlife. In this issue of the *Pineywoods Post*, we bring you a close-up look at the interesting armadillo and the gregarious purple martin. You will also learn about the new burn co-op forming in the central counties of the Pineywoods and get to know recently retired biologist Keith Aguillard.

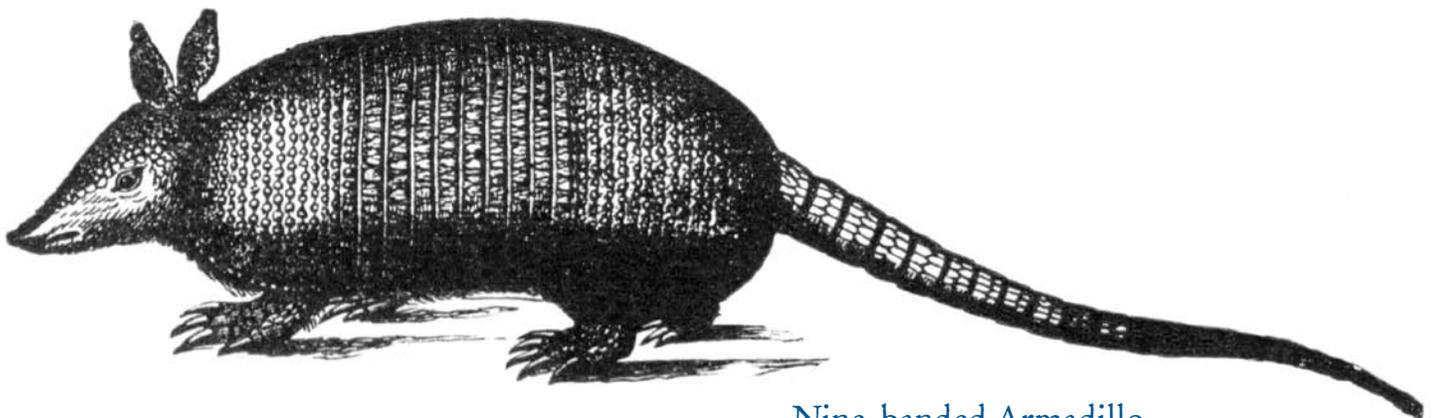
Don't forget to send in your wildlife or habitat photos for the *Stewardship Snapshot* section. Feel free to drop us a line with your suggestions or comments.

Thanks!

The editors,

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Nine-banded Armadillo

Courtesy Florida Center for Instructional Technology

Antler Restriction Shifts Age Structure of Buck Herd

by Gary Calkins, Pineywoods District Leader, TPWD

In the world of entertainment, the measure of success can often be seen by the number of T-shirts with a saying or logo made popular by a band or television show. In a way, the measure of success, or lack thereof, in the wildlife field, can be measured by the number of times we are stopped at the gas station and asked about the topic of the day. These discussions can range from rattlesnakes to bears, to the weather, and the impacts on turkeys. But in recent years, one of the more prevalent topics brought up is “antler restriction regulation.” Phone calls, hunting blogs, coffee shops and gas stations have all been the venue to praise or decry this regulation.

First order of business that I can’t stress enough—this is NOT a trophy buck regulation. Even though we have stated that numerous times, it can’t be stressed enough. The driving force behind this regulation is an improved age structure in the buck segment of the deer herd which has many human, social and deer-related biological impacts. Everything from hunter satisfaction to fawn recruitment are impacted by this management approach. The single-most important management decision that can be made on any property, in any given year, is the simple “to pull the trigger or not to pull the trigger—that is the question.” With the smaller property sizes and number of hunters on the landscape in the Pineywoods, that simple question has huge impacts across the landscape. The premise of this regulation is to help with that decision and lead to a better deer herd and ultimately a better hunting experience.

Without going into all of the boring details, this regulation allows for the harvest of bucks with an inside spread of 13 inches or greater, or at least one unbranched antler. This provides protection to young and middle-aged deer, allowing them to grow and mature, and leads back to that improved age structure I mentioned earlier.

Today’s society operates at high speed all the time. We have Internet, cell phones, and almost every other conceivable device to “stay connected”—even cell phones that go to the Internet. We have become accustomed to instant satisfaction in nearly every aspect of our lives. With wildlife management, this regulation being no exception, instant satisfaction isn’t part of the bargain. Deer couldn’t care less what new “app” is out there for

the newest gadget; nature still works at the same tempo it always did, so we are the ones that have to adjust.

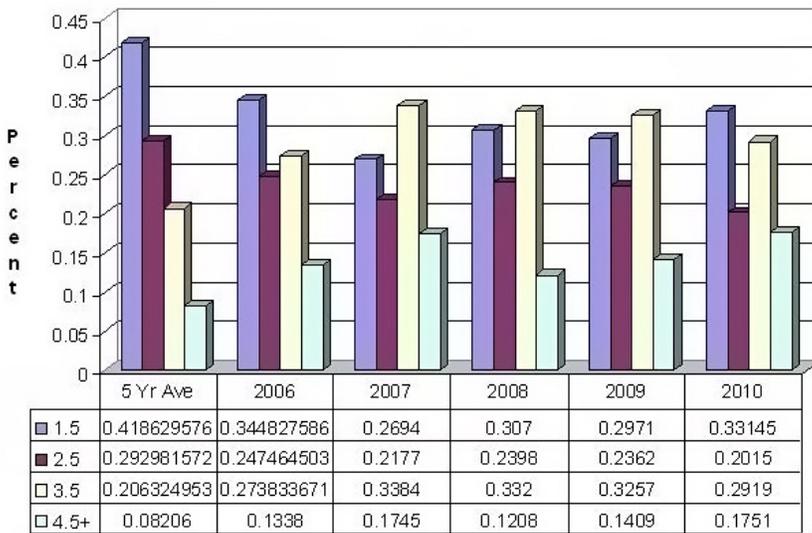
With changes in management approaches, it can take several years to reap the benefits, simply because we have to wait for nature to adjust and catch up. From the outset, we said that the first two or three years may be tough hunting after the change to this regulation, but that then hunting would improve. We have also heard everything from “the deer have to have narrow antlers to run through the woods so they will never get bigger” to “if we kill all the big ones, only the little ones will be left.” Years of data can show that neither of this is going to happen and that we are seeing an improving trend in the harvest across the Pineywoods.

The area that Texas Parks and Wildlife defines as the Pineywoods consists of 27 counties running roughly from Texarkana to Jacksonville, then to Houston and over to Beaumont, with the state line as the eastern boundary. This entire area had a deer herd that was being harvested too heavily in the younger segment of the buck herd.

When antler restrictions were first implemented, the northern 16 counties were the first group to have the new regulation. This decision was based on the fact that these counties were one-buck counties, had over 65 percent of the male harvest being 1.5 and 2.5-year-old deer, and through open “come one, come all” scoping meetings, had overwhelming public support to move forward. This initial group of 16 counties adopted antler restrictions, with the 2006-07 hunting season being the first year to operate under the regulation.

The 2009-10 hunting season was the initial year that the southern 11 counties in the Pineywoods operated under the regulation, with the just-completed season being only the second to see the regulation implemented. Even though this group of counties was operating under a two-buck bag limit, the harvest of immature deer was exceeding the 65 percent benchmark used in the north as well. Scoping meetings were also held across this area, the year before, to gauge public support, and while not as strong as the northern counties, the scoping meetings showed favorable response for the concept.

Percent of Harvest by Age Class - AWA Data in the Northern 16 Counties



Since the initial 16 counties have a little more history under the regulation, analysis of the harvest data is made a bit easier. When looking at the harvest data for the five years averaged prior to the implementation of the regulation, over 71 percent of the male harvest was made up of 1.5 and 2.5-year-old bucks. Simple math says that when you kill that many of them that early, there just aren't going to be many that grow old. No matter what the genetics of that animal are, nor how much he eats, unless he grows up, he will never be able to show the potential of those antlers on his head.

Since the implementation of the regulation in the northern counties, age structure has shifted down to 53 percent of the harvest being in that same age bracket. The most noticeable is the shift in the harvest of 2.5-year-olds from nearly 30 percent of the harvest, down to roughly 20 percent; and having a higher percentage of 3.5-year-old bucks in the harvest than 2.5's. Plus, the harvest of 4.5-year-olds and older is now at 17.5 percent of the harvest – nearing the numbers of 2.5-year-olds harvested.

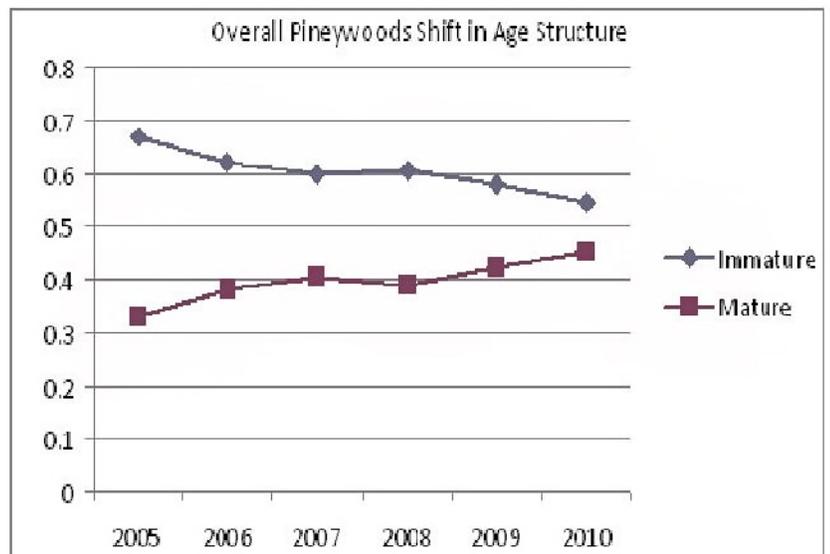
Since the southern 11 counties only have two years under their belts, those can't be analyzed on their own simply due to a lack of data. However, looking at the data from the entire Pineywoods lumped together, it shows a similar trend as the northern counties by themselves. From 67 percent of the harvest being the 1.5 and

2.5-year-old deer in 2005, it now shows that number to be just over 54 percent. The numbers of 4.5-year-olds and older in the harvest is almost identical to the northern counties and increasing.

We realize that it seems like a long time since the regulation went into effect in that first batch of Pineywoods counties, but we haven't even gone through a full generation of deer in that area. Mother Nature does not get in a hurry with things like this, so we have to practice patience as well. However, all indications are that we are going in the right direction. We are not only collecting age structure information; other research projects have been ongoing to determine the effects of the regulation on the deer population. Recently a research project was completed to see if the breeding dates of the does had shifted as a result of

the older age structure in the buck segment of the herd. Results are very preliminary, but appear to show that very trend. If it is confirmed, it will mean fawns on the ground earlier, having a better chance at survival, and a more stable deer herd. We will report the results, when they are complete.

In the meantime—go hunting, enjoy the resource, take that extra minute to not only evaluate the antler spread of the deer, but to simply enjoy the moment and the opportunity to be out there immersed in nature. If you shoot the first one that comes out, you will just have to go home. There are way worse ways to spend your time than hunting in the Pineywoods!



Armadillo

by Laura Speight, Regulatory Wildlife Biologist, TPWD



Sadly, the words “road kill” and “armadillo” are almost interchangeable. I was unable to find any statistics on the number of armadillos hit by motor vehicles annually in Texas, but to anyone driving the roads of Texas, it’s clear automobiles and armadillos don’t mix. Officially, the armadillo is the Texas state small mammal, but to many, they are thought of only as pests. The divots left behind in their quest for dinner tend to overshadow the good armadillos do by eating grubs and other insects in our yards and gardens.

The armadillo’s proper name is “nine-banded armadillo,” a name they obviously earned from the “bands” along their shield-like shell. To some, they appear almost turtle-like. They are indeed mammals. Females nurse their young, and if you were to flip one over, you would see scattered yellowish-white hairs. Their bodies are 15 to 17 inches long, and their tails are almost equal in length, usually 14 to 16 inches long. They weigh 8 to 17 pounds. Armadillos are native to South America. They began to expand their range north from



Mexico around 1880. By 1958, they could be found everywhere in East Texas. Their northward range is limited by the fact they have low tolerance for cold temperatures and do not hibernate; thus, they must live where insects can be found year-round.

It’s not just the armadillo’s looks that are odd, but also some of the facts and behaviors attached to this creature. For instance, armadillos breed in July, but their embryo will not be implanted for 4 to 5 months. Upon implantation, it immediately divides to form four identical offspring. Armadillos also have a low body core temperature ranging from 89.6 to 95 degrees Fahrenheit. For comparison, a mammal similar in size, such as a cat has a normal core temperature range of 100.5 to 102.5 degrees Fahrenheit.

Armadillos prefer to live close to water but are not among nature’s more graceful swimmers. When needing to cross shallow expanses of water, they simply walk across the bottom. Their lack of buoyancy makes this possible, but poses a problem when they must cross wide, deep creeks or rivers. To make swimming large expanses of water possible, armadillos ingest air and retain it in the digestive tract, thus increasing buoyancy, hopefully long enough to reach the other side!

A leprosy-like disease was first reported among wild armadillos in 1975. Leprosy is highly prevalent among wild armadillos in the low-lying coastal areas of Louisiana and Texas, but rare or absent in other

parts of their range. Leprosy, in armadillos, produces few outward signs, progressing very slowly, requiring 18 to 24 months before they succumb. Since human cases of leprosy are quite rare in the U.S. and exposure to armadillos not uncommon, the relationship between infections in wild armadillos and humans is unclear.

President Herbert Hoover once promised “a chicken in every pot,” but as political promises sometimes go, especially one so bold during the Great Depression of the 1920s, in the Deep South that “chicken” was sometimes an armadillo—thus earning armadillo’s the nickname “Hoover’s Hogs.” Another armadillo nickname, “gravediggers,” arose from the belief that they dug into graves and dined on the contents.

Gentle by nature, these visually and hearing impaired creatures are easily approached. You may get quite close and remain undetected as long as they don’t catch your scent. They are interesting to observe, but be prepared, for as soon as you see them raise their head, nose twitching, they are likely to startle and often jump, and not always in the opposite direction of what startles them. Their keen sense of smell may lead them to roadsides, but their poor sight and hearing make these areas especially dangerous and often prove fatal. As stated earlier, automobiles and armadillos don’t mix.

BIOLOGIST BIO - Keith Aguillard

In this edition of the *Pineywoods Post*, we visit with Keith Aguillard, recently retired TPWD regulatory wildlife biologist for Hardin and Liberty counties.

PW Post: What does a regulatory wildlife biologist do?

KA: I did what most other biologists do for TPWD. Specifically, I focused my time doing wildlife surveys including otter, browse, deer age weight antler data collection, and spotlight deer surveys. My work also included working with landowners in Liberty and Hardin counties on management plans, tax exemptions for wildlife use, and habitat management in general. I also fielded a fair amount of general inquires over the telephone. Since retiring in February, I have only fielded one call. I also provided outreach programs to elementary schools and to Texas Master Naturalists.

PW Post: Can you tell our readers about your background and how you became interested in being a wildlife biologist?

KA: I am one of eight children; I spent much of my time outside in the country and bayous surrounding my childhood home in the “bayou bottoms.” I actually grew up in Elton, a small town in southwest Louisiana. I went to high school in nearby Kinder, LA. I felt lucky to get to be out in the woods as a child. I describe myself as somewhat of an animal and wildlife freak during my pre-teen years. Even before I could remember, I was learning how to hatch and care for domestic ducks, geese and chickens guided by my grandfather.

Years later, in 1997, as a biologist living on Village Creek near Silsbee, I still could not resist the fowl of my youth. I bought 100 baby ducks to raise as my own pets.

PW Post: How many years did you spend in college and what is (are) your degree(s) in?

KA: I spent a total of six years at McNeese State University in Louisiana and received two degrees almost 20 years apart. I received my forestry degree first and then returned to McNeese for a second degree in wildlife.

PW Post: How long have you been a biologist? When and how did you start with TPWD?

KA: Like many other biologists working for TPWD these days, I had a varied path that led me to the profession of wildlife stewardship. My formal training and original career was in forestry. I worked for a number of years in Silsbee for Kirby Lumber in manufacturing, but after a downturn in the timber industry forced the sale of the facility where I worked, I switched jobs to become a member of the TPWD family.

I began my career with TPWD in November of 1984, when I heard about a wildlife and fisheries technician position with TPWD in Romer, Texas in Liberty County. I applied and was hired for that position on a seasonal basis, working on what TPWD folks call the



Keith Aguillard, former regulatory biologist for Texas Parks and Wildlife Department, shows interested kids a baby American alligator. Photo courtesy of Chris Gregory

“deer dog” study. As a technician in my early days, I was tasked with observing hunters, who participated in research to evaluate the effects of using dogs to hunt deer in Southeast Texas. Both deer and dogs were radio-collared to track animal movement and specifically to gauge deer response to being pursued in this manner. After the study was over in January of 1985, my seasonal position became a full-time position and I began my regulatory duties.

I eventually left TPWD, and the technician position, to return to college for my wildlife credentials. As luck would have it, after I graduated for a second time from McNeese, I was rehired into the same wildlife technician position that I had previously. Finally, in 1997, TPWD opened a regulatory biologist position covering Hardin and Liberty counties and I “moved into the biologist spot” and served in this capacity until I retired in February of 2011. I spent almost 20 years with the Department (TPWD).

PW Post: What is your philosophy as a wildlife biologist?

KA: I believe that biologists should drive the management and conservation of wildlife and their habitats. Each biologist should have a strong sense of responsibility with the stewardship of the resources within their counties of responsibility.

PW Post: What did you enjoy the most about your job?

KA: I enjoyed my job the most when I was outdoors and working with wildlife. I enjoyed participating in outreach to hunting clubs and kids as well as the camaraderie of working with fellow biologists and technicians on state wildlife management areas (WMAs) and conducting surveys.

PW Post: What do you find the most challenging about your job as a wildlife biologist?

KA: Working for any state or federal agency can be challenging because of the paperwork and bureaucracy, but the enjoyment of working in the great outdoors can outweigh even the heftiest desk work.

PW Post: What is the most amazing (or scary) experience you've had while working with wildlife?

KA: Special projects like the experimental alligator hunt at the J.D. Murphree WMA come to mind, where much like the deer dog study, I was allowed to observe two hunters at a time in boats as they harvested alligators with shotguns, rifles or bows. The deer dog study was also one of my most enjoyable experiences with TPWD.

PW Post: Do you have any advice for students who want to be professional wildlife biologists?

KA: It's tough to get a job these days. Just keep trying!

PW Post: How is retirement?

KA: I have just been enjoying the relaxation of retirement.

We wish you well, Keith. Thank-you for your years of service to TPWD and the people of Texas! You will be missed!

HABITAT Helper

Pineywoods Prescribed Fire Cooperative

by Rusty Wood, Forest Stewardship Biologist, TPWD

We are in the beginning stages of forming a prescribed fire cooperative, made up of private landowners who wish to burn on their own property. The primary goal of this cooperative is to put fire back on the ground in East Texas. The benefit will be reduced fuel loads across the Pineywoods, resulting in wildfire protection and, indirectly, wildlife habitat creation or enhancement.

The Pineywoods cooperative will be based on several successful models that already exist in different parts of the state and will be run by its members. Members will benefit from this cooperative by on-the-ground training and networking with other landowners with common goals, resulting in possible collaborative burns, access to prescribed burning equipment, and possible cost-share assistance for burning or creation of fire breaks. The cooperative will be supported by several partner agencies and non-governmental organizations to achieve the mutual goal of putting fire back on the Pineywoods landscape in a responsible manner.

We will be holding an initial meeting from 1:30-4 p.m. for landowners on July 5, at the Texas Forest Service Cudlip Training Center, located at 2127 South 1st Street, in Lufkin, Texas, off of Hwy. 59 South. Come find out

about the cost-shares that are available and what the Pineywoods Prescribed Fire Cooperative can do for you.

Should you need additional information, please contact Rusty Wood, Forest Stewardship Biologist with Texas Parks and Wildlife, at 936-462-1111.



A prescribed burn creeps through the understory of a pine-oak forest at Caddo Lake Wildlife Management Area in Karnack, Texas. Photo courtesy Penny Wilkerson

The Purple Martin

by Keith Aguillard, Retired Regulatory Wildlife Biologist

The purple martin is a very popular North American bird species due to its ability to consume flying insects at 100 to 200 feet above the ground, as well as for its entertainment qualities. Folks love to watch the acrobatics and the vocalization of the birds. Purple martins are North America's largest swallow and have a wing span of 15 inches. Martins are the **only bird species in the eastern half of North America solely dependent upon human-assisted nesting cavities for reproduction.** The biggest challenge in attracting a colony of breeding martins to your location is due to the martin's specific space requirements. The housing should be placed in the center of the largest open spot available, near the home, but no closer than 40 feet from the home or any trees. A little further out, say maybe 60 to 100 feet, is better.

Secondly, much dedication and effort is necessary to keep housing maintained and protected for use by the martins. Housing should be easy to manage, aided by the use of telescoping poles for mounting houses. Houses should allow easy access to the compartments for cleaning. Compartment floor dimensions should be at least 6 inches square. Larger compartments are preferred and offer more positive advantages and results. Height of compartments, ideally, should be 6 to 7 inches. Entrance holes should be 1 inch above the floor and 2 1/8 inches in size. Adequate ventilation and drainage should be incorporated with each compartment. Insulation may be added to the attic of the housing, which

could aid in reducing mortality of the hatchlings in the Deep South. Dividers in the compartments are necessary to prevent males from claiming extra compartments. Using dividers on the porch prevents nestlings from wandering to other compartments and unnecessarily creating opportunity for nestling mortality. Housing should be painted light colors to reflect heat. Martins prefer white housing.

Housing should be protected from predators by using predator guards on the poles for snakes, raccoons, squirrels, and cats. Pam spray, tangle foot, or a ring of grease can be applied to the pole to prevent ants from getting to the compartments. Do not use wire cables to help support housing because this would offer other access avenues to predators. Actively control the invasion of housing from house sparrows and starlings by trapping, shooting, and tearing out nests. Board up entrance holes after nesting is over and keep closed until the breeding colony arrives during spring migration. If a new housing site is added to a yard, it will be the subadult martins that will colonize the site. Subadults typically arrive four to five weeks after the first adults.

After nesting season, remove the nest and wash out the compartments. Do any repairs needed at this time. The cleaned house may be stored indoors until early in the next year.

If left on the pole, close entrance holes until breeding colony arrives. Here are some tips, for attracting purple martins. Erect all poles with houses on the property ten feet apart rather than scattered here and there on the property. Erect perches on additional poles or old

television antennas for perches. Place nesting materials on the ground near the houses. Nesting material can be straw, pine needles and even mud. Provide crushed eggshells or crushed oyster shells for them to consume.



Photos courtesy Chuck Abare
www.chuckspurplemartinpage.com

STEWARDSHIP Snapshots



Smoke rises from the ashes of a cool-season, late-spring prescribed burn at Caddo Lake Wildlife Management Area on March 22, 2011. This burn was conducted to reduce fuels and benefit wildlife habitat at the WMA. For more information about Caddo Lake WMA contact Vanessa Adams, area biologist. Courtesy of TPWD.



Josh Bardwell with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service drills native warm season grass seed into the parade grounds at Caddo Lake National Wildlife Refuge in Karnack, TX. TPWD biologists Laura Speight, Aron Flanders, other USFWS and TPWD professionals have joined forces to restore native warm season grasses and forbs as a demonstration for area landowners. Courtesy of TPWD.

SUBMIT YOUR SNAPSHOT!!! We'll accept photos from your game camera, cell phone or regular camera, as long as you took it!! Just email it to Penny.Wilkerson@tpwd.state.tx.us or Rusty.Wood@tpwd.state.tx.us and tell us who took it, what it is, when, where, how and why!"

"We abuse land because we regard it as a commodity belonging to us. When we see land as a community to which we belong, we may begin to use it with love and respect."

– Aldo Leopold



Summer 2011



July		August		September	
TPWD biologists @ work	MLDP cooperators & landowners	TPWD biologists @ work	MLDP cooperators & landowners	TPWD biologists @ work	MLDP cooperators & landowners
Trap & band mourning doves	MLDP cooperators conduct & submit deer spotlight/camera surveys	Conduct regulatory white-tailed deer spotlight surveys	Disc roadsides and rights of way to promote forb growth	Begin issuing MLDP permits	Plant fall/winter food plots by Sept. 15th
Conduct white-tailed deer spotlight surveys	Select sites for fall/winter food plots – begin soil testing	Begin compiling MLDP deer survey data & calculating permit issuance	Make soil amendments to food plots	Conduct mast production surveys of oak trees	North & Central Dove Season - TBD
			Start plowing food plots for weed control and moisture banking		

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