



## Excluding deer to help forest, local producers and the deer herd

### Warrensburg project tests ways to limit deer impact on forest

WARRENSBURG – Two new fences have appeared on the property of Pack Demonstration Forest in Warrensburg, but these fences aren't meant to keep people out of the woods.

Instead, the fencing is part of a project to show just how much of an impact white-tailed deer have on forest growth.

Warren County Soil & Water Conservation District staff teamed up with SUNY ESF, which oversees Pack Demonstration Forest, NY State Department of Agriculture & Markets and Capital Region Partnership for Invasive Species Management (PRISM) and other volunteers to install a total of around ½" acre of "exclosure" in an area of woods to keep deer out of it.

The goal is to show the difference between a forest that is protected from deer browsing, versus one that isn't. This project came about as the District has conducted many site visits in recent years to landowners and producers, where impacts from deer were noticeable, but not totally understood or

appreciated by the landowners. The landowners have asked what can be done to protect their investment, aside from hunting which may not be allowed for various reasons.

Jim Lieberum, district manager for Warren County Soil & Water Conservation District, pointed out that deer have a major economic impact for local farmers and property owners. Warren County is home to many Christmas tree growers, maple producers and forests that are utilized for many reasons, but all of these have positive economic impacts to the county and deer damage to these producers can have significant monetary impacts.

It has been found that a deer needs to consume up to 8 percent of its body weight in browse and greens each day which translates to nearly 10 pounds of forage for a 120 pound deer. You might think of deer as a herd of animals that will eat you out of house and home or more specifically your woods and yard, much like an over grazed pasture on a farm.

Finding ways to protect important hardwoods (and other valuable crops such as Christmas trees) from deer can help woodlands regenerate in the long term and prevent loss of protected plants and critical habitat for other wildlife. Having a local project that is open to the public to check out and determine if it is viable for a portion of their woodlot or other land, can be extremely important. Lieberum will be posting a report to the district's website ([www.warrenswcd.org](http://www.warrenswcd.org)) that includes what materials were used, how it was installed, any issues that were found, and what most people want to know - the effort and cost.

Deer populations have increased locally as winters have warmed, as fewer deer die from the cold and winter starvation, predator populations have dwindled and the number of hunters has declined.

With more deer has come more Lyme Disease, which is spread by the deer tick, and overpopulation can also lead to a weaker deer herd.

The 7-foot tall metal fence was secured to trees at Pack Forest to create a perimeter that will prevent deer from entering. This will be monitored by ESF staff and the District and repaired as necessary. The district will loan the fencing tools to use and would be happy providing some technical and logistical assistance prior for landowners. Lieberum said that sometimes hearing what didn't go according to plan can be more valuable than what did.

In addition to the height impediment, there is a psychological impact for deer as well.

Deer are afraid of being trapped, and deer frequently make judgments relative to safety. If an area appears to be small, they often won't enter, even when a fence is fairly low because of a fear of becoming trapped.