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Controlling Vertebrate Damage: White-tailed Deer
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Cooperative Extension Service
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CONTROLLING VERTEBRATE DAMAGE

Extension Bulletin E-874

April 1977

white-tailed deer

(*Odocoileus virginianus*)

See also the first in this series: Extension Bulletin E-860 on "General Considerations."

BY GLENN DUDDERAR, Extension Wildlife Specialist

THE FAMILIAR WHITE-TAILED DEER, is the nation's most popular big game animal. At times, however, farmers regard it as the most unpopular big game pest, especially when legal hunting does not keep deer numbers in balance with the natural food supply.

The white-tailed deer occurs throughout Michigan and causes damage ranging from consuming crops in small garden plots to presenting a hazard to aircraft on airport runways. When these situations occur, control of the damage is usually desired.

EXCLUSION

Fencing is the only way to exclude deer from any area. Since the fencing required is usually expensive, it is a method used only where the hazard posed by deer could result in the loss of human life or large monetary losses, such as at airports. An upright fence must be at least 10 ft. tall. Deer can leap a 6-ft. fence from a standing position, and many can clear 8 ft. without difficulty.

An alternative to an upright fence is a slanted fence with wire out-riggers. Drive vertical support posts into the ground so that they extend at least 4 ft. above the ground. Then attach 8½ ft. posts slanted on a 45-degree angle to the vertical post so that the high end of the slanted post is at least 6 ft. off the ground. Fasten one width of stock fence to the lower end of the slanted posts and 3 strands of smooth wire to the upper end of the slanted posts. Obviously, the fence should slant away from the area being protected.

A third fencing alternative is a 3-wire electric fence. Attach a triangular bracket, 3 ft. on each side, to supporting posts with the point of the triangle pointing inward toward the area to be protected. The lowest corner of the triangle should be 1 ft., 6 in. from the ground. Attach insulators to each corner of the triangle to support the 3 fence wires. Once the fence wires are strung, string connecting wires between the fence wires, charger and ground to complete a proper circuit. Control vegetation under the fence to prevent shorting of the circuit, and turn off the electricity successively to each wire as snow accumulation reaches that wire.

REPULSION

Thiram (42% solution) will repel deer from many plants. However, no repellants are effective when deer cannot find sufficient good quality natural food. Also note that a repellent applied in the spring will not repel deer from a season's new growth.

Dilute 1 qt. of thiram with 1 qt. sticker and 1 gal. water. Spray thoroughly on dry foliage. Use before damage begins. Do not apply to plant parts to be eaten by humans or livestock. Protection may last for 6 months, but new growth requires repeated applications. Spray fruit trees only when dormant. Dip forest tree seedlings before planting in fall.

Tankage—Place several ounces of tankage (the waste from a slaughter house or rendering plant) in small cloth sacks and distribute in and around the

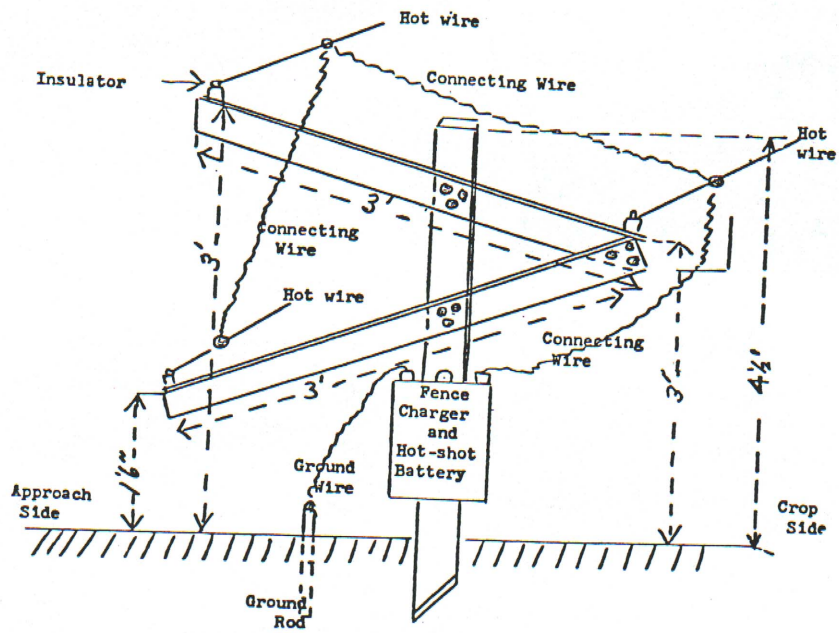
area to be protected. The amount and distribution of the tankage must be determined by trial and error because it is dependent upon the previous habits of the deer and the amount of pressure the deer put on the crop. In orchards, for example, it may be necessary to place tankage in every tree in one situation, in another perhaps only every fourth or fifth tree around the edge of the orchard.

The most practical method of determining the correct amount would be to place tankage around the edge of the area at intervals of 30 yards, and if damage continues, increase the amount until the deer stay away. Suspend tankage in a way that prevents its consumption by scavengers.

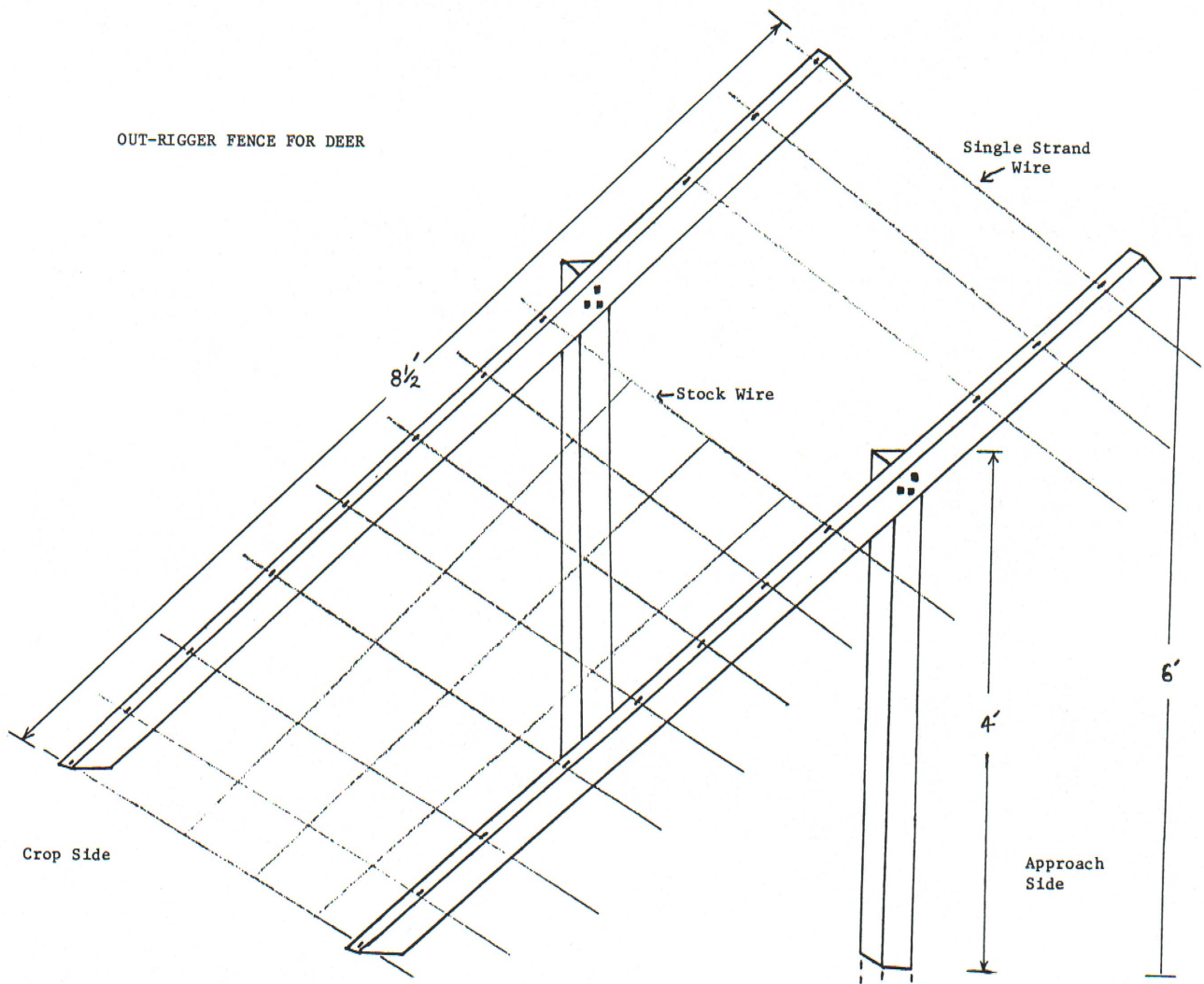
POPULATION REDUCTION

Shooting—In most cases, the best method of controlling damage to crops is to keep deer in balance with the natural food supply by harvesting the surplus animals during the legal hunting season. Unfortunately, uninformed sportsmen often want more deer in an area than the natural food supply can support and the resultant overabundant hungry deer turn to farm crops for food.

In this situation, repellents are usually ineffective and the farmer may be forced to shoot the deer himself under special permit and supervision of the local conservation officer. The most efficient method is to spotlight the deer at night when they are actually feeding on the crops.



Electric Fence for Deer



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