

White-tailed deer hunting on the Honobia Creek and Three Rivers WMAs

Have you ever wanted to hunt white-tailed deer but didn't have access to any private land for hunting? Look no further than the Honobia Creek and Three Rivers Wildlife Management Areas (WMAs) in southeast Oklahoma. That's right, private land that is publicly accessible and offers great hunting and fishing recreation.

The experience of hunting white-tailed deer on the Honobia Creek and Three Rivers Wildlife Management Areas in southeastern Oklahoma is tough to beat. Many family traditions have existed for more than 30 years in the "deer woods" of southeast Oklahoma, and these two WMAs still offer that hunting tradition to anyone who is looking for an affordable place to hunt white-tailed deer. In today's world, hunting leases can reach prices of \$5.00 an acre or more, which all too often prices out many outdoor enthusiasts. The Honobia Creek and Three Rivers WMAs offer 280,000 acres of privately owned but publicly accessible land for far less than 1/10 of one penny per acre. Imagine having a third of a million acres of private land to hunt deer on during the fall and early winter and then pursue wild turkey, squirrel, rabbit, quail, and other game during other times of the year. These two WMAs are true gems for hunting and fishing recreation.

The Honobia Creek and Three Rivers WMAs are privately owned by private timber companies and the areas are managed primarily for the sustainable production of pine timber. Both areas are dominated by loblolly pine plantations of varying age classes, but a quarter of the WMAs acres are managed as hardwood dominated timber especially along creeks and streams and in steep and rough areas not conducive to growing pine timber. Overall, the habitat on the WMAs is perfect for white-tailed deer production. In addition, the rugged terrain and abundant cover provides ideal habitat for deer to survive and reach older age classes giving a hunter a good chance of encountering a trophy animal. The WMAs also offer four walk-in only areas where biologists focus intense management efforts including prescribed burning, constructing watering ponds, protecting travel corridors, and establishing timber openings and habitat enhancement plots for deer, turkey, and other wildlife. Two of the four walk-in only areas allow vehicle access during the open deer seasons, but the 5,800-acre Signal Mountain Walk-in Only Hunting Area and the 1,500-acre Landing Strip Walk-in Only Hunting Area on the Three Rivers WMA are walk-in only year-round to provide hunters an area to hunt free of all vehicular disturbance.

Deer hunters visiting the WMAs use a wide array of tactics and strategies when trying to harvest a whitetail. Some hunters prefer to hunt out of a tree stand while others prefer to stalk deer by slowly walking through the woods. Many hunt hardwood dominated ridges and bottoms and some prefer to hunt mature or young pine plantations. No matter the strategy, scouting the area and having some knowledge about the food resources in the area is important. A little extra time preparing for a hunt by viewing aerial photos or topographic maps will also provide some help when it comes to choosing which areas to consider scouting first.

In general, white-tailed deer usually feed at dawn and dusk as they travel to and from their preferred bedding and loafing habitat. On the WMAs, preferred bedding and loafing habitat consists of areas with thick vegetative and woody cover. Young pine plantations are frequently chosen by deer for bedding and loafing and this type of habitat adjacent to mature

timber and especially hardwood dominated areas are great places to scout for game trails, rubs, and scrapes. Deer often get much of their water through the foods they consume, but if it hasn't rained for three weeks or more, hunting near a permanent source of water can provide big rewards. Many small watering ponds exist throughout the WMAs and these ponds often show signs of deer use especially throughout the fall and early winter. Many deer will use the oak-hickory dominated habitat along streams and creeks not just as feeding areas, but also as travel routes to and from favorite watering sources, other feeding areas, and loafing cover.

By far, the most important food source for white-tailed deer on the WMAs during the deer seasons are oak acorns, but grape vines, greenbrier, winged elm, beauty berry, and honeysuckle vines are also frequently eaten. Some simple acorn knowledge can help provide an edge when it comes to choosing a location to hunt. In general, all oaks fall into two categories, either the black/red oak group or the white oak group. Studies have shown that although no significant difference occurs in nutrition, white-tailed deer prefer to consume acorns from the white oak group over the black or red oak group. Studies have also shown that deer will consume approximately 1.5 to 2.0 pounds of acorns per day per 100 pounds of body weight. Finding a location on the WMAs with an abundance of white oak acorns will not guarantee success of seeing deer, but these spots are worth the time to scout.

In addition to scouting a location, some simple knowledge of how weather conditions effect deer can increase the chances of harvesting some venison for the dinner table. Keep in mind that all wildlife, including white-tailed deer, will adapt and do what is necessary to survive, but in general, deer do tend to favor certain weather conditions when it comes to their behavior. White-tailed deer will, in general, be more active when the temperatures are not too warm. When the temperature reaches 60 degrees Fahrenheit, deer typically begin to become far less active. Similarly, when the temperatures are extremely cold, especially with cold gusty winds, deer will also slow down. Winds greater than 20 miles per hour will slow deer activity especially when the winds are continually shifting from different directions. Shifty winds can often make a deer feel uneasy or uncomfortable since it is more difficult to determine which direction they may be picking up threatening sounds and scents.

The barometric pressure definitely influences deer movement as well. Deer seem to favor a rising or falling barometer over a stationery one, and studies have shown that if the barometric pressure is steady, deer seem to favor a steady high barometer over a steady low barometer. Other variables will also influence deer activity including rain events and moon phases and spending some time learning how these conditions effect deer activity definitely can pay big rewards when choosing when and where to go after that trophy deer.

The Honobia Creek and Three Rivers WMAs are open for the archery, primitive, and deer gun seasons. In general, the deer archery season runs from October 1 through January 15 each year while the primitive (muzzleloading) deer season begins on the fourth Saturday in October and runs for nine consecutive days. The deer gun (rifle) season was increased to 16 days beginning in 2008 with the opening day always occurring the Saturday before Thanksgiving Day. As always, be sure to consult the Oklahoma Hunting Guide before scheduling any hunting vacation.

Accessing the Honobia Creek and Three Rivers WMAs for any type of recreation does require each person to purchase a Land Access Fee permit. The permit, \$40 for Oklahoma residents between the ages of 18 and 64 and \$85 for nonresidents (no age exemptions for nonresidents), is good for one calendar year and is sold at all locations in Oklahoma that sell hunting and fishing licenses. All revenue from each Land Access Fee permit sold goes not only toward the management of the WMAs, but also to pay the timber companies an annual lease fee to help keep the WMAs open for the public to enjoy. Please, when visiting the WMAs, be sure to leave only footprints. Picking up any trash or litter is a great way for everyone to help keep the WMAs open for all to enjoy.

Feel free to contact the Honobia Creek and Three Rivers Wildlife Management Area biologist at 918-527-5308 before planning your next hunting trip to the Honobia Creek and Three Rivers WMAs.



Shed antler found in the Signal Mountain Walk-in Only Hunting Area on the Three Rivers Wildlife Management Area.



Plantation row plot planted to wheat on the Honobia Creek Wildlife Management Area.



Plantation row plot planted to rye and vetch on the Three Rivers Wildlife Management Area.



Forest opening planted to wheat and winterpea on the Three Rivers Wildlife Management Area.



Proud grandson showing off his grandpa's trophy harvested on the Three Rivers Wildlife Management Area.