

SMALL-ACREAGE LANDOWNERS HAVE OPTIONS FOR HARVESTING WILDLIFE

Tired of deer eating your flowers and shrubs, rubbing on trees, or annoying pets?

Have you thought there were too many deer in your area? Have you gone to great lengths to deter deer from your flower beds and gardens?

If you answered yes to any of these, hunting may be the solution that will benefit you and the public, feed families, and help maintain healthy wildlife populations.

Those who hunt small-acreage property typically sit in blinds or hidden locations and wait for animals to come to a location before taking a shot. These hunts can occur on parcels of property as small as a few acres; however, in such a small area, landowners working with their neighbors is imperative so everyone is on the same page before hunts occur. If a reduction in deer numbers is desired, hunting can be restricted to doe harvest only.

You may be thinking, “It is not safe to shoot guns with my neighbors so close,” “My neighbors will not approve,” or “My property is too small to allow hunting.” Most of these concerns can be addressed to make small acreages a place where hunters can help manage local wildlife issues.

A great example is a Sheridan-area landowner who has a small field – less than 10 acres. This landowner saw a need to address



photo: Amy Lutz, Shutterstock

increased deer numbers. He carefully evaluated his property, set up a safe shooting zone, and recruited hunters to harvest deer. Over 50 deer are harvested annually from this area. The hunters get a place close to town to hunt and the opportunity to harvest a great source of meat for their families.

Not every landowner can do this, but with a little cooperation between neighbors and a set of safe rules hunters abide by, hunting can be the best option for decreasing the size of a deer population.

Safety is top priority

Let's take a look at the top concerns of many small landowners.

Safety needs to be the top priority when hunting. Being sure of a target and what is beyond is one of the safe firearm handling rules taught all hunters in a hunter education class. To address this, the first step is to talk with your neighbors. If experiencing problems with a high number of deer on your property, your neighbors are likely as well, and they may be willing to help set up an arrangement that benefits everyone in the area.

Make sure to bring up several points including potential safe zones of fire, what happens if a wounded animal crosses onto the neighbor's property, and where and when hunters will be hunting.

There are instances where one small property may not be safe to hunt but if several small-acreage owners join together, a safe place to allow hunting can be created. If you are creative and landowners

are in agreement, there may be an opportunity for a hunt in community green spaces or in draws or canyons between subdivisions.

Good communication is the key to making small-acreage hunts a success, so stay in touch with your neighbors during the hunting season to identify any concerns or conflicts.

What firearms should be allowed is the next issue. While evaluating a property, you can often identify a location where hunters can safely use rifles to harvest game. This location requires a good back stop, and ensure there are no hazards or safety concerns in that zone of fire.

If a rifle is not safe to use, Wyoming law allows hunters to take big game with a muzzleloader, shotgun slug, or buckshot (limited-range firearms) and will humanely harvest those animals. Another option is to only allow the use of archery equipment. Archery equipment can safely be used in areas that have smaller safety zones and more potential hazards.

Hunting within city limits considerations

Contact your local police department before allowing any hunting if a property is in city limits. Many cities restrict discharge of firearms within city limits but allow archery hunting, although they may require a permit from the local police department.

The Wyoming Game and Fish Department (WGFD) website (<https://wgfd.wyo.gov/>) also has a landowner assistance page where landowners who are accepting

hunters can add their names, contact information, and what species they will allow to be hunted. This is a great way to connect hunters with landowners who would like animals harvested.

Once a landowner has scheduled the number of hunters they want to take, their name can be removed until he or she chooses to be put on the page again. Please contact your local WGFD regional office to learn more about this opportunity or sign up.

Finally, WGFD has three opportunities for landowners in their Access Yes program – Walk-in Hunting, Walk-in Fishing, and Hunter Management Areas. These programs, funded with donations by hunters and anglers and other sources, were created to make it easier for landowners to allow hunting or fishing for the public.

The WGFD provides landowner payments, signs for the access area, law enforcement patrols, and several state statutes provide liability coverage to landowners enrolled in these programs. Please visit <https://wgfd.wyo.gov/public-access> for more information on the Access Yes program.

Contact your local game warden, wildlife biologist, WGFD regional office, or the headquarters in Cheyenne if you have any questions.

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