

## SCOUTING - THE FOUNDATION OF DEER HUNTING

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By Steve Felgenhauer

Taking a record book buck can be attributed to luck, but hunters who take them on a regular basis attribute scouting as their secret weapon. It's safe to say the majority of deer hunters only spend the month prior to hunting season traipsing in the woods to gain insights to deer activity, but there are some hunters who have taken it to a new level.

### Three experts, three different views and methods of scouting.



Legendary whitetail hunter, Barry Wensel has taken scouting to new heights. "There is no substitute for time spent in the deer woods," says Wensel. "For me, scouting is a full time job; after hunting season ends, I'm out there the next day or within the week."

"Too many hunters say, Oh the season is over. I am not going to harass the deer anymore for a few months. The winter snows come and there's too much snow. Then the snow melts and they say, Oh it's been a hard winter they stressed so they wait, then fishing or turkey season comes in. The summer is too hot or too many ticks or bugs and just before archery season they start putting out trail cameras or they will wait until season opens and after the first couple days of not seeing anything they start walking around to figure out why they aren't seeing any deer. A hunter who wants to take good bucks must to do his homework," states Wensel. He likens scouting to baseball spring training. Baseball can't be played in March due to the weather; instead they go to Florida where the conditions are more conducive to practice. Hunters shouldn't wait until opening of the archery season and start scouting.



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"Scouting is a lot like putting a puzzle together and a hunter's greatest weapon is their mind," states Wensel, who invested five years scouting the buck he eventually took last season. "I set up the situation in my mind where the deer would come from and what it would do without disturbing it or causing the buck to change its routine. I get a lot of satisfaction from this," says Wensel. "Scouting leads to understanding, understanding leads to confidence, confidence leads to patience and patience leads to success. The basis of this formula puts you in the proper mind frame. I never go hunting without a positive mind frame."

His favorite scouting method is a two day old snow. "I like to backtrack to see where the deer are coming from and why," explains Wensel. "If you see a bed, look and determine why the deer chose this spot to bed. Chances are you will find the wind was on the deer's back and was watching its back trail. You learn so much about undisturbed deer by doing this."

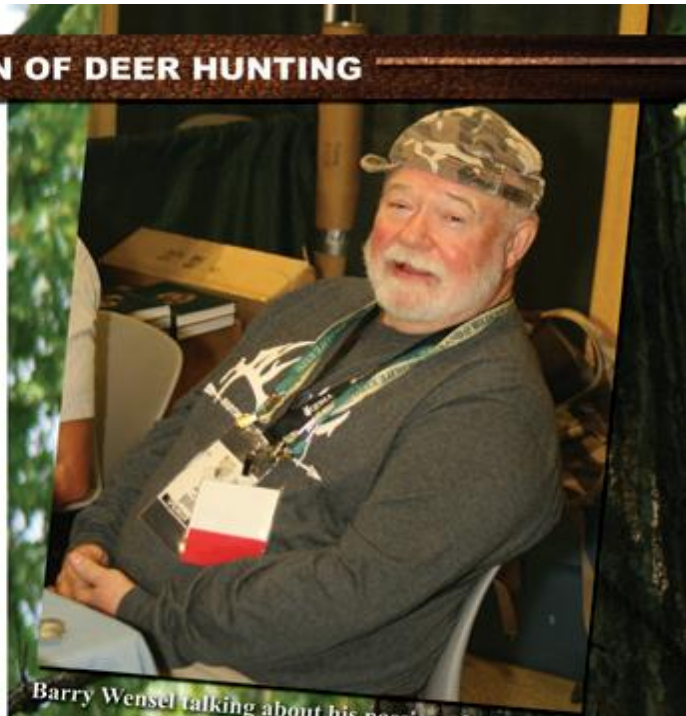
### Long distance Scouting

Dan Perez of Whitetail Properties puts leather on the ground but unlike Wensel, Perez backs off long before season to observe from afar.

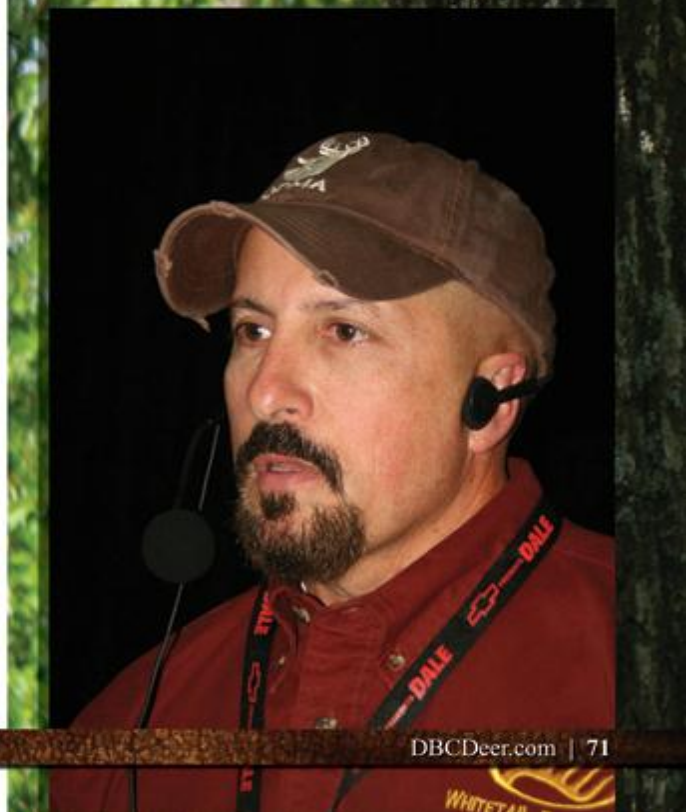
Though Perez's philosophy differs from Wensel's, perhaps geographical differences are the reason. Much of Perez's hunting properties are surrounded by farm ground and Perez believes the less human intrusion, the better. "We get the farm ready to hunt, put in fall food plots and by August we don't set foot on a hunting property until season begins," says Perez. "I set up cameras and check them, but I set them where I don't have to get more than a step or two from the truck when switching cards in the cameras."

Perez scouts from his truck by glassing for much of the time leading up to season.

*Dan Perez giving a seminar about scouting big bucks.*



*Barry Wensel talking about his passion; deer hunting.*



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*Scouting food sources can clue hunters where to hunt all season. These soybeans are being hit hard.*



*In the field with Dr. Grant Woods.*

### Hi Tech Scouting

Dr. Grant Woods is considered one of the leading whitetail biologists in the nation and is a die-hard mature buck hunter. Woods and his team perform numerous deer surveys, annually. They place corn and mineral blocks near their trail cameras to record the deer that shows up for the treat. Woods and crew may sift through some 20,000 images during these surveys. The deer are then counted and a formula is used to estimate the population of the deer herd. During one such survey, Woods noted the number of photographed bucks taken during daylight hours which would coincide with legal hunting hours were very few and far between. "Hunters have worked hard to condition deer to avoid them," says Woods. "Think about it, we are walking around the woods and we find a rub or other sign and we get out our cell phone and take a picture to show all our buddies. What you are doing is telling the big mature buck, there is a big stinky predator in here just at daylight. Don't come in here at daylight, it smells horrible."

Woods' scouting is done with trail cameras and like the other hunters he uses these to his advantage and passes along these tips to help hunters get the most from their trail cameras.

### Woods' top five questions to answer when scouting and patterning bucks

1. "Are there mature bucks in the area?" If there are no bucks in the area, perhaps a different area would be a more attractive area to hunt. It's much easier to sit in a stand when you know a big mature buck or better yet, multiple bucks hang out in the area your hunting. A trail camera will answer this question in a just a few weeks.
2. "Which bucks travel more in daylight hours?" A deer moving in daylight hours is a killable buck.
3. "Which resource does a buck use in daylight hours?" We all know deer need three resources; food, water and cover, but chances are the deer only uses one of these during daylight hours and then perhaps only briefly with a trail camera set up on these areas, you can determine when and how often.
4. "Can I get to these areas to hunt the buck?" By examining the photos an established travel corridor can be discovered without disturbing the deer.

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5. "What are the characteristics of the bucks you are targeting?" How does the buck interact with other deer and where is he on the pecking order. Often these questions can be answered by using a trail cam. Is it a dominate buck? A bully or is it more submissive? This can clue a hunter in to the method of hunting to use. For example, a dominate buck hears two bucks fighting (or a hunter rattling aggressively) he might rush in to show the two bucks who's boss. On the other hand, a submissive buck while still being a mature buck might slink off without ever being seen. Pictures taken with trail cams can capture behaviors and interactions giving the hunter the upper hand.

As they say, there are more ways to skin a cat but no matter your preference; scouting leads to patterning which leads to a big fistful of antler.



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