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Deer Population Threatened
As Food Supply Is Depleted

The northern white-tailed deer is depleting its winter food supply in the Lake States region to such an extent as to create a situation that, if not corrected, will have a disastrous effect on the animals themselves, the Bureau of Biological Survey reported to Secretary of the Interior Harold L. Ickes.

Based on laboratory examinations of 72 deer stomachs and on field observations by Biological Survey scientists in the Kabetogama and Cloquet Valley State Forests and the Superior National Forest, in Minnesota, the report pointed out that the available winter food supply is a limiting factor on deer populations in areas where the animals are greatly restricted in their movements by extreme cold weather and heavy snows. These conditions prevailed in the areas studied.

In fall, plants of the willow family are eaten in greatest quantity, while balsam fir ranks second. Balsam, however, is a starvation diet, the report showed, and is eaten in large quantities only when deer cannot obtain choice foods. Pine, which is also being eaten in rather large quantities, likewise has poor nutritive value.

By winter, the deer already have eaten the choice foods and are compelled to feed on balsam, pine, and spruce, the three most available plants. The

seriousness of the deer-food situation is indicated by the fact that the three plants, if fed on more or less extensively, are all poor foods, spruce being eaten in large quantities only when conditions are severe.

The best deer food in this region is white cedar, which was not found in large quantities in the deer stomachs examined, because the deer had consumed almost all the available supply before the fall-winter study began. Feeding experiments conducted by the Michigan Conservation Department indicate that white cedar is the only native browse that fed alone will support deer in winter. The results of these experiments, it was pointed out, emphasize the difficulties faced by deer in winter.

Management practices must be developed for limited areas, the report recommended, if deer are to be maintained in optimum herds in healthy condition.

Shaler Aldous and Clarence F. Smith, who made the study, have summarized their findings in a leaflet on "Fall and Winter Habits of Deer in Northeastern Minnesota," which has been mimeographed by the Biological Survey.