The loblolly-shortleaf pine type area can produce an abundance of timber and deer forage.

Piney Woods Deer Research

Robert M. Blair and Louis Brunett[1]

A LITTLE OVER a year ago, bulldozers and fence construction crews invaded a secluded piney woods area about six miles south of Winnfield. The noisy activity in this otherwise quiet setting marked the beginning of a joint research effort by the Louisiana Wild Life and Fisheries Commission and by two units of the United States Forest Service.

The main objective of these agencies is to find how many deer can be grown in well-stocked timber stands of central Louisiana. Also, they want to learn what kind of plants deer like best, how different concentrations of deer affect range vegetation and forest regeneration, and how to tell whether a deer range is properly stocked.

Foresters call this the loblolly-shortleaf pine type. It is one of the finest pine forest types in the South for growing game and timber, because it can support both a tall growth of pines and a dense understory of shrubs, vines, and small trees that provide excellent forage and cover for deer. Louisiana has large acreages of such forests (see accompanying map), and the deer population in them is increasing rapidly.

To achieve the purposes of this cooperative investigation, the Wild Life and Fisheries Commission constructed three 160-acre enclosures for stocking with known numbers of female deer. Last winter eight young does were placed in one

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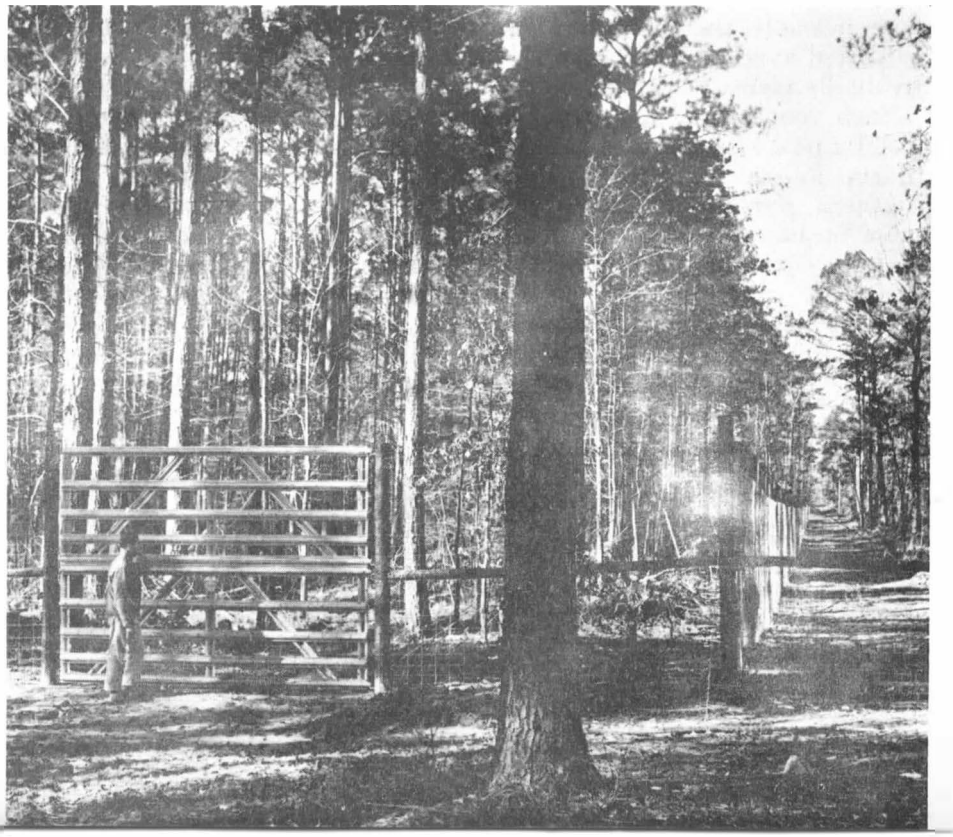
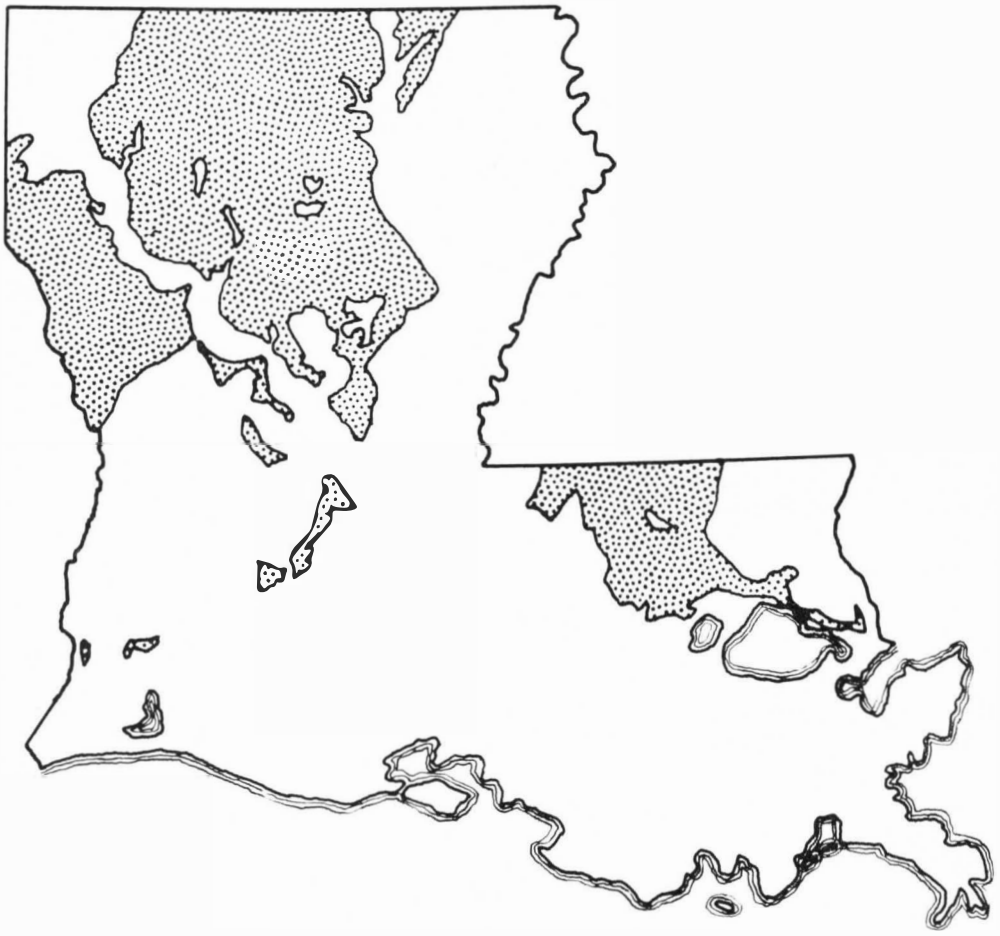


Seven miles of 9-foot-high woven wire fence keep deer within specified areas and exclude livestock, dogs, and unwanted deer.



Louisiana's loblolly-shortleaf timber type (shaded area) contains more than three million acres of top-notch timber land and deer range.

enclosure to represent overstocking and two in another to represent understocking. Four deer were put into the third enclosure to set up the estimated average for the area. The deer are individually identified by varicolored plastic collars.

Each cooperating agency is responsible for a specific phase of research. Personnel of the Alexandria Research Center — a field unit of the Southern Forest Experiment Station—will find out what happens to the timber and forage. Each year they will measure how much forage is produced by over 150 plant species, what proportions of these plants are eaten by deer, how the size of the acorn crop affects the use of browse, and to what extent deer nip off or trample young pines.

Game biologists from the Wild Life and Fisheries Commission will keep close tab on what happens to the deer. They will capture some of the animals each year to weigh them and check their physical condition. They will also maintain fences and supervise periodic drives to count the deer.

The Kisatchie National Forest will manage the stand for timber. Pines will be the main commercial crop, but hardwoods valuable for lumber will also be grown. Cull hardwoods will be killed if they are directly interfering with pines; otherwise they will be kept.

This study is the first of its kind in the South. It should help to answer many questions asked by hunter, wildlife technician, and forester. As the facts unfold, these groups should be better able to manage forests so as to ensure crops of both game and timber. ✠

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