

Effects of Supplemental Feeding on White-tailed Deer Diets

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Availability of supplemental feed may affect the vegetation consumed by white-tailed deer. Supplemental feed may affect deer diets by providing a continuous and reliable food source in which the feed fulfills some nutrient requirements otherwise provided by vegetation in the environment. The objective of our study is to determine the effect of supplemental feed on white-tailed deer selection of plant species and forage classes.

We measured white-tailed deer diets using tame females permanently released in 4, 200-acre enclosures with and without access to supplemental feed (treatments). Seasonally, foraging deer are followed by an observer, and the plant species and amount consumed are recorded. Vegetation consumed is placed into forage classes of browse, forbs, grass, cacti, mast, and sub-shrubs. We compared the forage classes consumed between deer in the 2 treatments to evaluate how providing supplemental feed affects diet selection. Preliminary data do not show major differences between forage classes consumed by deer within either treatment.

By studying the effects of supplemental feed on forage selection, we hope to gain a better understanding of how supplemental feed influences deer foraging ecology. This knowledge may also provide a better understanding of potential long-term effects of supplemental feed on white-tailed deer and their environment.

Cooperative funding was provided by the Comanche Ranch, T. Dan Friedkin, Faith Ranch, and Neva and Wesley West Foundation.