

INVASIVE PLANTS, DEER AND FOREST REGENERATION: OBSERVATIONS FROM SOUTHEASTERN VERMONT

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In the past fifteen years, foresters in southeastern Vermont have been increasingly disappointed with their forest regeneration treatments. We have watched good, knee-high northern hardwood regeneration on good sites succumb to deer browse, invasive exotics and aggressive hay-scented and New York fern.

This presentation is a collection of observations, theories and speculation about this change to our forests and how we may be able to adapt. For example, some of us believe that as colonies of invasive exotic plants become well-established and disperse increasing numbers of seeds to occupy new areas, deer aid in their success by selectively browsing our regenerating native species. We speculate that this in turn lowers the forest's carrying capacity for deer at the same time hunters are demanding higher deer populations. To successfully adapt, we may need a collaborative, multi-action approach that includes vegetation management that slows the spread of invasives, people management that breaks down social barriers between hunters and non-hunting landowners, and deer herd management that prioritizes forest health (carrying capacity) above consumer demands (hunter and wildlife observation satisfaction).