

Fencing Out Big Game Species

BY DALE L. NOLTE

Fencing is the most effective approach to deter big-game movements. However, cost to install and maintain effective fences can be prohibitive. Further, fences across rough terrain can be impractical.

Although simple designs can effectively deter deer and elk from some sites, more complex designs are necessary if the protected resource is highly desirable or if normal transitory patterns, such as migratory routes or paths to water, are disrupted. The task becomes more daunting if your desire is to construct an impregnable fence.

Fences less permeable for elk and deer are a minimum of eight feet and preferably 10 feet high. Woven wires are more effective than strands of smooth or barbed wire. A combination of woven wire below and strand wire placed immediately above it provides additional height and can be effective. An electrified fence provides better protection than a similar non-electrified fence. Building a double or slanted fence adds depth, making it more difficult for ungulates to jump over. A series of small intermittent fenced-in areas, or exclosures, may be more effective to impede ungulates than a long extended barrier. The smaller exclosures do not block access to resources or impede migratory movements as severely as a continuous fence.

Fence materials need to be visible to reduce risk of animals running into them. Long stretches of smooth wire or even woven wire can create hazards to wildlife. Attaching flagging to wires can greatly reduce risks.

Although wire needs to be stretched tight, materials with some give when struck will further reduce risk to animals, along with reducing need for repairs.

NWRC Olympia Field Station scientists conducted a study to assess desirable fence attributes of an elec-

trified fence. Our results indicate that wire spacing between lower wires should be no more than nine inches, but wires located higher on the fence could be spaced at greater distances. Intermittent bars to prevent wires from spreading may improve efficacy. Interspersing a ground wire between lower strands may also further reduce deer crossings. Although probably



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Fences at least six feet high that are constructed of durable, visible and electrified wires can be effective in deterring deer.

trified fence to impede black-tailed deer. Fences were constructed at four-, six- and eight-foot high with varied wire spacings. Not surprisingly, efficacy to deter deer was highly correlated with the animal's motivation to cross a fence. Black-tailed deer tended to go through rather than over fences. However, animals that jumped fences did so repeatedly and with ease. Closer wire spacing, approximately nine inches, reduced crossings. Although highly motivated deer can jump eight-foot fences, during these trials six-foot fences deterred deer. Therefore, a less expensive fence could be a viable tool to restrict ungulate browsing. We suggest that the fence be constructed

not adequate for all deer or highly motivated deer, a six-foot fence may restrict most. Such a fence may be more practical if the fence could be dismantled and materials used at another site as trees became less vulnerable to browsing. Electric fences installed in remote areas could be powered by solar panels. ♦

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