



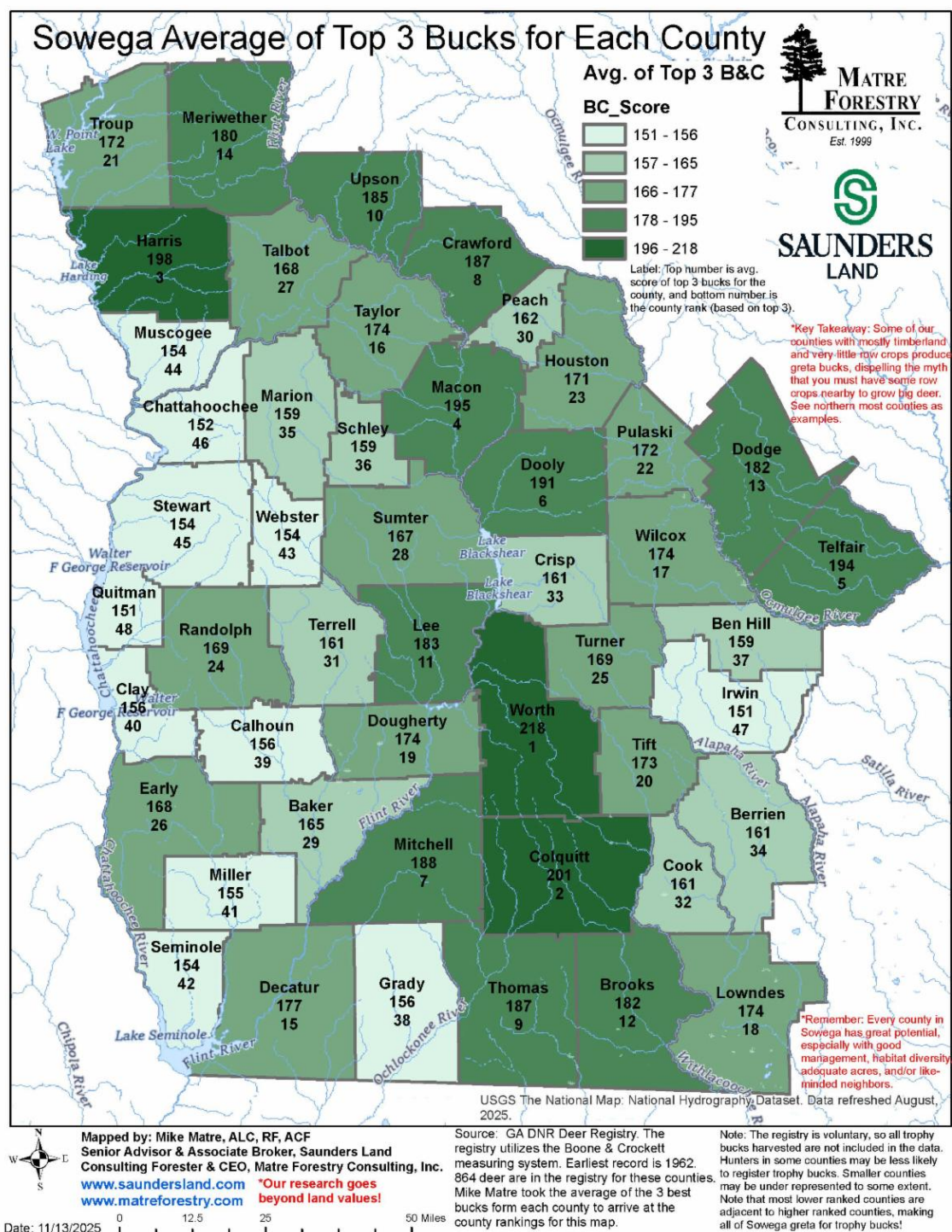
11/13/2025

Re: Sowega Trophy Buck Map with Commentary by Mike Matre

Dear Matre Forestry Newsletter Subscribers,

If you have subscribed to my newsletter for any length of time, you know I like to dig deep into land and timber market data, but we also dig deep into wildlife data, as hunting value is such huge driver of our land market. Scroll through some of my past newsletters for some great wildlife and habitat management information and data at <https://www.matreforestry.com/newsletter.html>

My latest deep dive into the topic of trophy buck harvests across Sowega is summarized in the map below, with some commentary below the map (to download your own PDF copy of the map, [click this link](#)):



If you are a Sowega deer hunting enthusiast, there are some things in the above map that likely do not surprise you, such as Worth County being ranked #1, and the whole Flint River corridor being very strong for trophy bucks. But, there is more to be gleaned from the map above, which I will share below.

First, the source: The Georgia DNR Deer Registry is the source for the map data. See <https://georgiawildlife.com/georgia-deer-registry>. Using the deer registry, I downloaded all records for the counties represented in the above map. I then took the top 3 bucks for each county, and averaged the top 3. That result is how I ranked the counties.

Things to consider about the Deer registry and the above map, and some stats:

- The registry is voluntary, so not all trophy bucks are accounted for.
- Data goes back to 1962, and there is a total of 864 registered bucks in the dataset for the subject counties. There are 48 counties in the above map, and the top 3 bucks for each county summed up to 144 bucks included in the final data.
- The largest buck in the top 3 bucks for each county was a Telfair County non-typical buck that scored 248, shot in 1998 by Billy Joe Padgett.
- The smallest buck in the top 3 bucks for each county was a Seminole County typical buck that scored 138, shot in 2002 by Billy Billy Whittaker.

- The average of all of the top 3 bucks for each county was 171.
- The average all bucks in the registry for the 48 counties represented was 151.
- Hunters in certain counties are less like to register trophy bucks. For example, Lee County consisting of a lot of very large landowners with large working farms and large hunting plantations may be more private minded and may be more likely to keep large bucks harvested quiet. Other examples of "private" counties are Baker, known for large quail plantations and large working farms, and Thomas known for large quail plantations. Counties with more large timberland holdings and more "hunting clubs" such as Randolph or Stewart may have a higher concentration of hunters that are more likely to register larger bucks.
- Smaller counties may be underrepresented, which likely hurts the rank of smaller counties. For example, look at Peach and Webster counties. Hunter success for trophy bucks is likely better than the data shows, simply because they are such small counties.

If shopping for land of your own, or a hunting lease, do not shy away from lower ranked counties, and here is why:

- Most lower ranked counties are adjacent to higher ranked counties, and a normal range for bucks is ± 1 to ± 3 square miles, with rutting bucks sometimes taking "excursions" from ± 1 to ± 4 miles from their core area.
- Some of the lower ranked counties also have lower average land values, allowing you to maximize acreage for your budget.
- Any and every SOWEGA County has great potential for quality bucks. Factors for any potential tract or lease acquisition include past management, potential for improved management, habitat quality and diversity, water resources, acres, and neighbors.

Advantages of buying or leasing in higher ranked counties:

- Although often the higher ranked counties cost more per acre, one of the the most important advantage of buying in higher ranked counties is the increased likelihood of being adjacent and near likeminded landowners that are more likely to practice trophy management.
- Obviously in higher ranked counties, your odds of consistently harvesting quality bucks are usually increased.

Key Takeaway:

- The map shows that some of our "timber counties", that do not have significant row crop acreage, produce great bucks. Take a look at most of the northern counties on the map, which tend to be "timber counties", and look how impressive the average of the top 3 bucks for each of those counties are. That dispels the myth that you have to have a mix of row crops and timber to grow big deer. While having row crops on a hunting tract, or nearby, is a positive attribute, it is not a requirement to grow big deer. The key on a timber tract, and a tract in "timber country", is to manage the timber well for wildlife. Thin pine timber when needed, and even thin hardwood timber when feasible and needed, to increase sunlight to the forest floor which promotes desirable ground cover and browse. Clearcut periodically in blocks for habitat diversity, and income. Burn your uplands, preferably by burning 33% to 50% of your uplands on a rotation to promote desirable early successional habitat. Burning in winter and spring is most common, but careful summer burns are beneficial as well. Limit upland hardwood burning to winter burns. Make sure your timberland has openings, some of which can be planted as food plots and some can be left fallow. $\pm 10\%$ to $\pm 20\%$ open is ideal. Lastly, control unwanted scrub and hardwood in the understory, which shades out desirable early successional groundcover, via herbicide as needed.

In conclusion, please let me know if I can assist you with land sales, acquisitions or management. Thankfully, I have had a lot of land sales lately, but that means it is time to replenish my listing inventory!

See our company wide Saunders Land listings at www.saundersland.com .

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Mike Matre

Thank you very much for being a subscriber to the Matre Forestry Newsletter, a great way to keep up with land for sale, and receive occasional news regarding timber and land market conditions, land management and investment tips, and occasional giveaways. We would also invite you to like Matre Forestry on Facebook and Instagram and/or YouTube, and Mike Matre on LinkedIn. We keep our subscriber list confidential and you can unsubscribe at anytime.

Sincerely,

Mike Matre, ALC, ACF, RF

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