

WOODS 'N WATER™

**Spring
Gobbler
Edition**

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MARCH 2026
48TH YEAR 8TH ISSUE
\$4.50

**Fishing
Reports**



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THE KOHLER CHRONICLES:

Advice & Anecdotes from a Third-Generation Land Broker

By Jon Kohler, JD

JON KOHLER
& ASSOCIATES



Food Plots, Not Parking Lots

Can whitetail deer save North Florida?

by Jon Kohler

I've got a running joke I tell friends when they ask why I'm still obsessed with deer hunting after all these years. "I've never taken drugs. Don't gamble. No interest in strange women. But I have been known to do some stupid things because of my hunting addiction."

They laugh... because they get it. Down here, deer hunting isn't just a hobby. It's our culture. Our tradition. It's the one thing that can pull a welder, a banker and a PhD into the same campfire conversation like they've known each other their whole lives.

So, here's the question increasingly on my mind every time I cross the Suwannee River. I see the front lines in a battle between two competing cultures inching northward. It scares me. Our

timber markets have taken a hit, and the massive timber companies that were once the bulwark are retreating, leaving private farm and timberland owners to stand alone.

Could deer hunting – more precisely, the recreational value of deer hunting – be one of the primary forces strong enough to keep North Florida rural? I think it can.

The Shift Nobody Saw Coming

A lot of folks forget how different North Florida used to be. I grew up in a time and place where deer weren't something you managed for. To many now, it's become the land's purpose, no longer a simple byproduct. Recreation is now the main "crop."

That shift matters. Because once hunting becomes the focus, the value



THE TRADITION CONTINUES - The hunting tradition continues for the Kohler family. Greayson Kohler, pictured here with his brother and his father, proudly displays his first buck. The fine whitetail was taken at on the family farm, Lick Skillet. (Photo courtesy of Jon Kohler)

of rural land stops being measured only for its agricultural value but also its often higher recreational value. This puts the family farm in a new position where memories are worth more than pulpwood, and the land's intrinsic value is tied forever in your soul.

Let's Say the Quiet Part Out Loud

A lot of us are nervous. Pulpwood values are below what they were when I was in college. Mills have not just closed, but permanently dismantled. With 10-year permitting hurdles and \$10 billion investments, mill experts tell me it's all but impossible to build a new one. And, multiple hurricanes didn't just damage timber – they broke nest eggs put in the timberland basket.

The good news is that for many properties, a subtle shift in focus is all it takes to make them great recreational properties. There's no way the late Agricultural Commissioner Doyle Conner could have imagined that his beloved Bar-C Ranch would be worth 102% more as a deer hunting property than for cattle. That's exactly what we proved when the new owner asked for our opinion, and we quickly resold it for \$7,873 an acre more

– more than doubling what it had sold for not long before.

Deer Are Driving Land Values in Ways Most Don't Understand

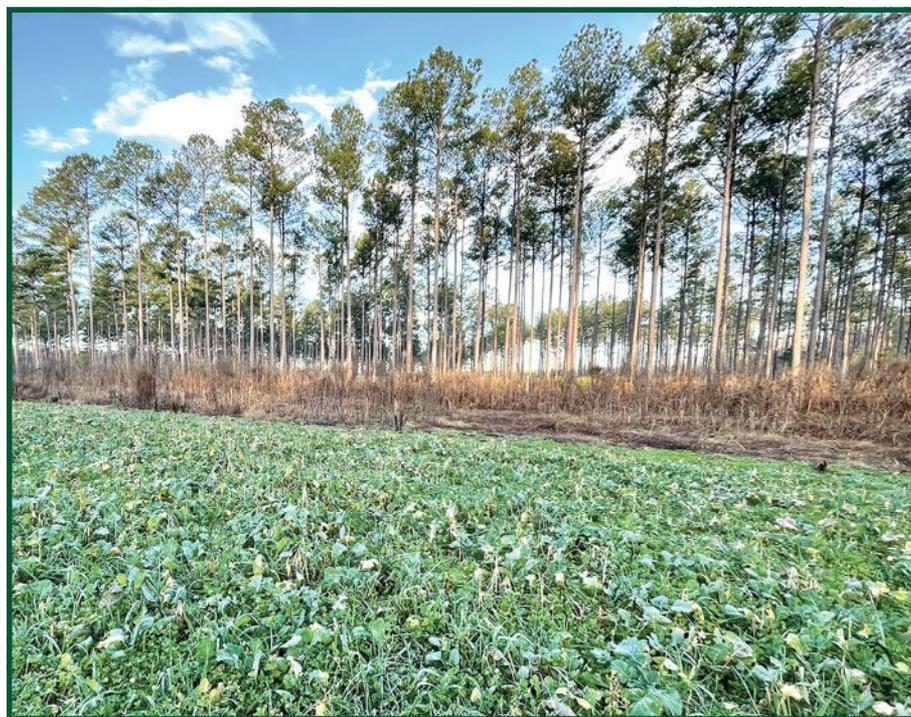
If you want to see what a deer-driven market looks like, look at certain counties in Georgia, where protecting young bucks isn't viewed as "restriction," but as pride. Where buyers, predominantly from Florida, drive hours through otherwise good lands to arrive where they're assured of good genetics and neighbors who "let them go so they can grow."

In some of those places, the "trophy buck premium" is so strong that recreational land consistently sells for the price of irrigated farmland – and beyond.

A Dooly County farm where a buck recently graced the cover of GON magazine proved this. When the bank appraisal came in short, the buyer couldn't close. I picked up the phone and in one call sold it for full price, all cash. The appraiser became a believer after we proved the trophy buck premium was 52%.

What about North Florida?

What Florida lacks in recreational land strategy, it makes up for in conservation. (Continued on next page)





What about a 'Bucks, Not Bulldozers' bumper sticker?

(Continued from previous page)
 vation lands. I love Wilton Simpson's successful Rural and Family Lands Protection Program. The state has acquired conservation easements for over 200,000 acres of working agricultural land. This year's budget is \$250 million.

What if FWC also looked at deer age structure like an economic development tool – one that costs the state nothing? In my real estate business, I see it every day. More and more people want to pursue mature bucks. The lands where they are consistently found have higher land values and grow hunting-related local economies, all the while encouraging folks to be better stewards of the wildlife God has placed in our care.

These working lands need that right now. Converting some of it to recreational land can be the model. To use the capitalistic system to hold up land values and push back the sprawl. We call it the Working Lands Initiative. To let

landowners know there is hope, there is another option. To encourage more land to be managed closer to the way God created it.

The bumper sticker "Cows, not condos" is fitting. But I'll offer my version:
Bucks, Not Bulldozers.
Food Plots, Not Parking Lots.
Deer, Not Developers.

I know having deer to eat saved many a culture in the past. Perhaps we should consider that having deer to hunt can help save our culture too. A rural way of life. A landscape that still feels like Old Florida. And, the kind of land that makes a person grateful God's given them the chance to sit in a stand at daylight, listening to the woods wake up, and realizing – quietly – that this is about more than hunting.

And, in the strange economics of our time, the whitetail deer may be one of the strongest allies rural North Florida has.



ELIZABETH PLATT OF JACKSON COUNTY, FLORIDA KILLED HER FIRST 8-POINT with a cross-bow on Dec. 7, 2025 around 7 a.m. in Jackson County. She made a perfect heart shot.

THE MUSIC CAPITAL OF THE SOUTH!
24th Annual Florida State Bluegrass Festival
April 3rd-4th, 2026
Forest Capital State Park
Highway 19 South - Perry, FL





The Kody Norris Show



Appalachian Road Show



Remedy Tree



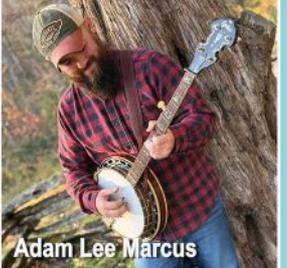
Mountain Highway



Kenny Stinson & Perfect Tym'n



Rekindled Bits of Grass



Adam Lee Marcus



Kenny Hill Band

Appalachian Roadshow, The Kody Norris Show, Kenny Stinson and Perfect Tym'n, Re-Kindled Bits of Grass, Remedy Tree, Mountain Highway, Adam Lee Marcus, Kenny Hill Band & More
 Two Day Pass: \$40.00 in advance ONLINE or \$45.00 at the gate. (Friday \$25.00 or Saturday \$30.00)
 Crafts, Food Vendors, Moon Pies, Kid's Fun Zone

ON-SITE CAMPERS:
Thursday Night Bindo and Potluck at 6:00 p.m.
(Bring Covered Dish)

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