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THE KOHLER CHRONICLES:

Advice & Anecdotes from a Third-Generation Land Broker

By Jon Kohler, JD

JON KOHLER
& ASSOCIATES



One Bite. Lifestyle Over.

A new, incurable disease aimed squarely at the people who live on the land

by Jon Kohler

Are you following the latest string of new diseases? If you love the outdoors, this one has its sights set on your family.

I understand if you haven't kept up. My wife has had about enough of the news – either enough of hearing bad things or enough of me saying, “Yep, that's right out of the Book of Ezekiel.” God put prophecy in the Bible so we'd know the signs and not worry.

But this pestilence caught me off guard. This one is close to home – so close that I've been hesitant to write about what could change, and is already changing, my own lifestyle.

I broker and own recreational land, and I'm an advocate for the outdoors – especially for getting kids into it. My life's work is to get more people out there, not fewer. So, I don't say this lightly. But when I see us walking into harm's way,



I'm going to be candid about it.

I teach my boys to watch for poisonous snakes, alligators, hornets and not to trust the neighbor's pit bulls. Now, a lowly tick has risen to the top of that list.

The thought of becoming deadly allergic to meat and dairy – going into anaphylactic shock over fried backstrap at Thanksgiving dinner – scares the heck out of me.

My son has already had Lyme disease. I survived ehrlichiosis myself. We're already two out of three on tick diseases. At least those can be cured, or subdued, with antibiotics.

I'm not sure yet what all of it means, and my thinking will surely change. But right now I find it curious that a new, incurable disease lands squarely on the readers of *Woods 'N Water* and barely touches the lifestyle of the folks watching *The View*.

I study history and I study the outdoors. I've been watching this thing for some time now in other places – but now it's in our woods, and the spread isn't slowing down. Native Americans and early colonists never mentioned these tick-borne diseases. So, where did they come from?

A Curious Piece of Geography

The first infamous tick illness, Lyme

disease, was formally identified in 1975, in Lyme, Connecticut.

So where the heck is Lyme? It sits about 17 miles from the Plum Island Animal Disease Center – an 840-acre island a mile and a half offshore, where the U.S. Department of Agriculture, and later the Department of Homeland Security, have studied contagious livestock diseases since 1954. Interestingly, the island was chosen because the water around it was thought to be a natural barrier, reducing the risk of anything getting loose and reaching the mainland.

I don't know what happened there. I'll only tell you what's on the public record. In 2019, Congress ordered the Department of Defense Inspector General to investigate whether the U.S. military experimented with ticks as biological weapons between 1950 and 1975. That is not a rumor off the internet. That is the United States Congress asking the question.

The most recent tick-borne disease, alpha-gal syndrome, wasn't identified until around 2009 – just 15 years ago. On a hunch, I went looking for which county in America has the most cases of it.

According to the CDC's own data, it's Suffolk County, New York – more suspected cases than any other county

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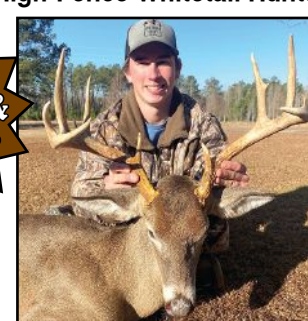
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...The sickest I've ever been

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in the United States. Suffolk County is where Plum Island sits. Do your own research. But I'll admit the first thing that came to mind was an old saying: this ain't my first rodeo.

What Alpha-Gal Actually Does

Here's what is known for certain. A lone star tick bites you and injects a sugar molecule called alpha-gal into your blood. That sugar is in every mammal we eat. Your immune system decides it's a threat. And, from that day forward, when you eat red meat or dairy – beef, pork, venison, milk – your own body turns on you.

Not right away, either. Three to six hours later, in the middle of the night: hives, swelling, trouble breathing and sometimes full anaphylactic shock.

I'm told it can be as unforgiving as a peanut allergy. For the most sensitive, even the fumes off a grill can be enough. There is no cure – though some are working on a vaccine. And, there's that rodeo

thought again...

If you still trust the CDC, here are their own numbers:

- *As many as 450,000 Americans may have it.*
- *About 60 percent of them suffer full anaphylaxis.*
- *In a 2022 CDC survey, 42% of health-care providers had never heard of it.*
- *Another third had heard of it but weren't confident diagnosing or managing it.*
- *Only 5% of providers said they were very confident treating it.*

A Wrench in the Whole Plan

Here's what really gets me.

Scripture tells us to be prepared. To be independent. To provide for our own. That's how I try to live. For a lot of us down here, self-sufficiency isn't just a hobby – it's an instruction.

Alpha-gal throws a wrench right into the middle of it.

The cookouts. The barbecue. The freezer. The smoker. My family's tradition of fried backstrap at Thanksgiving. All of it, gone in one tick bite.

And the people most exposed to this thing are exactly the people who spend their lives outdoors, trying to be self-reliant and trying to share God's creation with their friends and their children. Us.

And Now They've Said It Out Loud

Here is the part I could not believe when I first read it...but then I could.

In 2025, the peer-reviewed journal Bioethics published a paper by two



university professors arguing that because eating meat is morally wrong, and because people can't be trusted to quit on their own, promoting the spread of tickborne alpha-gal syndrome is – their words – “morally obligatory.”

They are not alone. A bioethicist at New York University, tied to the World Economic Forum, has been making the same case for over a decade. In a 2012 academic paper he proposed “human engineering” – artificially inducing an intolerance to red meat by turning your own immune system against it. Then, on video, he said the quiet part: “There's this thing called the lone star tick, where if it bites you, you will become allergic to meat. So that's something we can do through human engineering.”

But understand what has happened here. Serious people, at serious institutions, in peer-reviewed journals, have written down in plain English that a disease which takes away a man's ability to eat what he raises and harvests would be a moral improvement.

The Sickest I've Ever Been

Ehrlichiosis – another lone star tick special – matched COVID for the sickest I have ever been in my life.

My doctors had no idea what was wrong with me. You know who figured it out? The late Lane Green, CEO of Tall Timbers. A fire man. He diagnosed me in conversation after a turkey hunt. Doxycycline knocked it out – after I had to talk my doctor into prescribing it.

And, here's the kicker: that doctor, the one who follows CDC guidance to the

letter, still doesn't have it in my chart. To this day. As far as the medical system is concerned, it never happened.

That was 20 years ago. By the time my 12-year-old picked up Lyme, the doctors knew more. But it raises a question I have been afraid to answer: at what point does it get too risky for a dad to take his boys into the woods?

When I was a kid, we worried about rattlesnakes and alligators – and you can do something about those. You can take precautions. You can see them coming. With a tick, it's the elephant that can't get away from the little mouse.

What Actually Works

So, what can we do? The one thing that has always worked. Fire.

The same thing Lane Green – the Johnny Appleseed of prescribed fire – preached his whole career. I burn everything I can at Lick Skillet, every chance I get. Researchers comparing burned ground to unburned found that encounters with disease-carrying ticks were 98% lower on the land that burns.

...98%

But one burn won't get you there. It takes the consistent, disciplined, every-two-to-three-year program you see on the plantations – not the five-plus-year rotation you see on a lot of state ground. And, the trick is to burn more than just the pine uplands. Get the fire into every corner it will go.

There's another tool worth knowing about. In Connecticut and the other ground-zero Lyme states – the places

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Keep the torch lit

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with no fire culture at all – they’re running what’s called a “4-Poster.” It’s essentially a corn feeder with roller applicators that coat a deer’s neck and ears with permethrin while it eats. Remember: DEET repels ticks; permethrin kills them. In studies, where enough stations were maintained over several years, tick populations dropped by 70% to 90%.

A lot of high-fence folks in Florida have known about these for years. One of my clients showed me his own improved design a decade ago. I took notice – but back then, ticks weren’t a life-or-death issue. They are now.

If the 4-Posters are as good as Con-

necticut says, then a statewide or national program – run the way we run screw-worm eradication – ought to be on the table down here. In the meantime, I’m putting them out at Lick Skillet. We already worm our preserve deer with ivermectin, and I know that helps.

They Sent My Boys Into It

My boys went on a school field trip to the Joe Budd Wildlife Management Area not long ago. I appreciate the outing – I want kids in the woods more than anybody.

They were covered in seed ticks. Many of you know exactly what I mean. Freshly hatched, by the hundreds.

Now, Joe Budd has a good burn

program, and I’ll give them credit for it. But according to my boys – one of whom has his own custom drip torch – they don’t burn the grassy field right in front of the classrooms. They mow it. So the one patch of ground where the children actually stand was the one patch left unprotected.

It’s time our burn programs answered to something bigger than wildlife habitat. Bigger than wildfire suppression. Bigger even than making our land worth more. It’s time we burned for public health.

One Bite Cannot Take a People

So, here’s my dilemma, and I suspect it’s about to be yours.

I can spray my boys down with permethrin every time we go. But permethrin is like sunscreen – sometimes you get it right and sometimes you forget, and the ones most likely to forget are the ones with the most to lose. I cannot chemical



“SO, BURN YOUR GROUND, AND BURN IT OFTEN,” says Jon Kohler. “Burn more than the uplands – put fire in every corner it will go. Not just for the habitat. Not just for the wildfire. For the kids.”

my way out of this. Nobody can.

And, I will not answer that other question the way they would like me to.

I know exactly what their answer sounds like. Keep them home. Put them on a screen. Let the woods grow up thick and rank until nobody remembers what they were for. They have already written it down in a journal, in plain English – that a man losing the ability to eat what he raises might be a moral improvement.

Jesus was plain about this. “If ye were of the world, the world would love his own.” We are not of it. It does not love us. I made my peace with that a long time ago.

So, they said theirs out loud. Let me say mine.

Not on my watch.

We do not surrender the woods. We fix them. We are independent.

And here’s the thing – we are the only ones left who still know how. We never lost our fire culture. Connecticut would give anything for it. And, it may well turn out that the very thing our granddaddies did without thinking about it, the thing a lot of us still do every spring, is the thing that saves our grandchildren’s dinner table.

So, burn your ground, and burn it often. Burn more than the uplands – put fire in every corner it will go. Then go ask whoever manages the land your children walk on to do the same. Not just for the habitat. Not just for the wildfire.

For the kids.

One bite can take a lifestyle. It cannot take a people who refuse to give it up.

Nobody is going to thank you for the work.

So, let me be the first. Thank you. Keep the torch lit.

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