



# TAKE YOUR PROPERTY TO THE NEXT LEVEL

*The management decisions you make can have a ripple effect that influences your success for years — if not generations.*

■ *TEXT AND PHOTOS by Kristopher M. Klemick*



**Y**ou've just been handed the keys to a kingdom — whether it's a multi-year lease, the opportunity to acquire a parcel of your own, or the OK from a friend, neighbor or private landowner who has agreed to let you do habitat management work on their land. The excitement for what happens next is unmistakable, and your enthusiasm immeasurable. So much potential, so many possibilities and so many projects to tackle before the next hunting season begins. But where do you start? More importantly, how do you know you're making the right decisions? The list is long and can quickly begin to seem insurmountable.

Fortunately, the company you know and trust for your attractant, mineral site and food plot needs also offers an unmatched service that brings all things habitat management under one roof and available at your fingertips. The White-tail Institute of North America is the oldest true consultant in the industry, with a history and proven track record dating back to the 1980s of offering answers to questions and resources to help hunters improve their habitat, herd health and success afield. In 2023, the company took this leadership role one step further when it launched Next Level Consulting, a full service, end-to-end approach to land management headed by wildlife biologist and director Jody Holdbrooks.

Perhaps you've seen the comical television ads of people calling an insurance agent at all hours. Well, Jody is the Institute's equivalent of Jake from State Farm.

"Yes sir, the Whitetail Institute of North America has fielded more food plot questions than any other consultant in the country," he said recently.

"I'm available to answer all questions any time. I truly believe I have the best staff to work with, because they are all wonderful with customer relations. We've been doing it since 1988."

## INITIAL CONSIDERATIONS

From the moment you reach out for information, the service Jody and his team provides is what you would expect when working with WINA — a top notch, best-in-class experience.

“I’m available all season,” Jody said. “If a hunter wants me to come out, I can be there. To start, we’ll discuss your property and talk over the phone, and look over maps and any soil tests. I also like to see what crops, if any, are being planted in surrounding areas. All I need is your location, and I can put together a quote.”

The beauty in WINA’s Next Level Consulting is in the name. It isn’t focused strictly on food plots. Jody helps land managers take their properties to the next level by assessing the entire spectrum; everything from food plots and mineral sites, tree stand locations and access roads, timber stand improvement, weed management, herd density and health, opportunities for success, potential challenges and everything in between.

“We create habitat that allows food plots to be truly supplemental and not the sole wildlife food on a piece of property,” Jody said. “This is not just food plots, even though we are focused on getting those right. I look at all avenues of wildlife management. My goal for all consulting clients is to create habitat that doesn’t make the wildlife rely solely on food plots.”

## THE PROPERTY TOUR

After Jody has gathered and reviewed background information, and had an initial conversation with the landowner, the next step is a boots-on-the-ground site visit. Scheduled during a time most convenient for you, he’ll perform a thorough review of the property, including pulling soil samples from established and prospective food plot areas.

“Site visit time is all up to the client and, of course, the size of the property,” Jody said. “It’s vital to look over the entire property to ensure we are doing all we can to properly manage each piece of it. While I really want the landowner with me, I have done a few site visits alone, which is doable but can present a disadvantage because I can’t ask questions and get feedback while I’m there.”

Josh Congdon recently obtained

## NEXT LEVEL CONSULTING PAYS DIVIDENDS IN FLORIDA

*A solid management plan turned a property with undernourished deer and few bucks into a hunting paradise.*

■ by Don Williams



**T**wo years ago, I bought a 250-acre northern Florida pine farm with 10 acres of food plots. Unfortunately, the fields were overgrown and had been neglected for many years. The soil was sandy and full of weeds.

I reached out to Whitetail Institute to see if they had a hands-on consulting division that could help. I was looking for a multi-year approach that would tell me what the soil needed and also the best crops that would be good for the wildlife and help turn the sand into soil through time. Luckily, they did.

Whitetail Institute sent one of its consultants to test the soil, and we went to work. During the past two years, we’ve added almost 10 more acres of food plots, and the fields are getting better by the season. Whitetail provided me with written plans for each food plot that stated how to treat the soil, what to plant and how to treat any weeds. This process has worked extremely well.

After I bought my farm, the deer on my trail camera pictures were so skinny you could see their ribs and hip bones. Now, the herd is looking healthy. The size of the herd has also increased in just two hunting seasons. It’s typical to see 20 or more deer in one hunt.

My first year on the farm, I didn’t see many bucks. I decided not to shoot any bucks but to take four does. This past hunting season, we had more bucks, and larger ones. We let so many bucks walk this year. I harvested a large 8-point that I would say is a great Florida buck.

I can’t wait to see where this goes in the future. A great land management plan from Whitetail Institute and a QDM plan have already produced results in just two years.



103 acres in Virginia. He knew what he wanted to do with his first piece of hunting ground and was confident in his ability to do it.

“I wanted to lay out the best practical use for the property,” Congdon said. “So I created a plan looking at what the land offers today, where it has a monoculture, where do I want to make changes and where do I need to make changes? I can add food plots that support turkeys and deer. I’ve got spring food plots and fall food plots. I’ll introduce controlled burns. There’s so much, and I wanted to be able to incorporate all the tools available to ac-

celerate those changes based on what I wanted to do with the property.”

Even after years of practicing and actively managing habitat on other people’s land, Josh recognized calling on Next Level Consulting and the full expertise of Whitetail Institute was a no-brainer.

“You don’t want to miss out on an opportunity that exists or push certain aspects too aggressively,” he said.

Making mistakes is a part of life. We learn and grow from them. However, from the seemingly smallest of decisions to the bigger ones, such as critical clear-cutting activities that can potentially affect generations, negative life lessons can be downright devastating for a property.

“Before Jody came out, he sent me an extensive series of questions about what’s been planted before, past soil tests, deer density, how much I hunt, how many people hunt the property, neighboring properties — all the questions an experienced consultant should ask. We built a great relationship. We talked, talked again, had a couple of more conversations after those, and at that point, I decided to book a consultation with him. The site visit was fantastic. We spent the day together. We had breakfast and then went to the property and looked at every aspect of it bouncing ideas off of each other. We were able to spend a lot of quality time together on the property.”

## THE MANAGEMENT PLAN

What Next Level Consulting offers



■ With Next Level Consulting, you have the entire Whitetail Institute team working hard for you so you don’t have to go it alone. Important decisions you can trust are made as a team.

isn’t a cookie cutter, carbon copy blueprint that might improve your

property if the habitat manager follows everything to a T and the stars align. That’s not realistic.

“Habitat management and deer hunting is a passion that’s created a lot of methods and different ideologies on the Internet,” Jody said. “Just because you have success with one management technique in one property doesn’t mean it works on all properties.”

Every piece of property is unique, and a comprehensive, individualized management plan is carefully crafted for each one.

“What Jody offers is a tailored solution to two things,” Josh said. “The property layout itself and the aspirations of the owner. The management plan he prepared reinforced not only all of the things we talked about, but it also laid out different ways and styles to manage the challenges I have, offering different ideas to attack the issues.”

## PROGRESS AND RESULTS

Josh and Jody remain in regular contact with each other.

“I’m talking to guys via text, email or phone nearly every day,” Jody said. “Consulting customers know that I’m available to help in any way.”

“Jody is very accessible,” Josh said. “His greatest skill is listening and creating a plan that facilitates your unique needs to your parcel. For example, when he came out, I showed him a clover plot I had going but it wasn’t quite where it needed to be. This property is more than an hour from my home, and the plot got away from me. We looked at it and talk-

ed about tearing it up to start fresh but then he said, ‘Josh, what do you think?’ I said, ‘If I look at this right-hand side, my gut says let’s see it in spring, and he said, if that’s your feeling, let’s do that.’ I did what I was supposed to do. We overseeded, we hit it with herbicide, and guess what? It bounced back, and I now have a beautiful plot. Jody looks at things. He gives you feedback, and he listens to you. These are the decisions we make together.”

Thanks to Next Level Consulting and the relationship Josh has built with it, he’s already seeing incredible results with deer, turkeys and other wildlife.

“You get out of it what you put into it,” he said. “If you put the right practices in place and put in the hard work, you will see the benefits. Another example? I only used to have two or three turkeys on the property every now and then. Now I have an entire flock that is consistently on the property. They’re now roosting in the pine trees off my clover plot. That didn’t happen organically. I’m also seeing black bears more often, too.”

If you’re looking for a habitat management plan that’s customized to your property, incorporates the pieces necessary for success, and partners with you every step of the way to help you achieve your goals, have a no-obligation conversation with Jody. To learn more about Next Level Consulting, contact him at (800) 688-3030, email [jody@whitetailinstitute.com](mailto:jody@whitetailinstitute.com) or visit <https://whitetailinstitute.com/next-level-consulting/>