

STILLWATER, Okla. â€“ Bucks have only one thing on their minds this time of year, and it is not the person sitting in the tree stand with a rifle pointed squarely in their direction. It is all about the does. Sue Fairbanks, assistant professor of natural resource ecology and management with Oklahoma State University, said bucks are moving much more than normal in search of females. â€œThe elevated testosterone levels at this time of year can change the physical appearance of the bucks (e.g. enlarged necks) as well as behavior,â€• she said. â€œThey will be more aggressive toward other bucks, and potentially humans if they get between a buck and his receptive doe.â€• The good news for hunters is avoiding predators (or hunters) is not the number one thing on their minds at this time. â€œThat being said, opening weekend of the gun hunt does catch their attention, or the attention of the females they are trying to locate,â€• Fairbanks said. â€œOpening weekend can shift deer from public hunting areas to areas, both public and private, where hunting is prohibited. This is the main reason most deer are harvested on opening weekend - before the deer have shifted and become more wary.â€• Opening weekend for deer gun season always accounts for the highest number harvested. While weather is a factor in the equation, the simple fact deer are not expecting, or even thinking about, hunters leads to a large harvest. "Field reports say the rut is ramping up," said Erik Bartholomew, big game biologist for the Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation. "Now is the time to go, so don't miss opening weekend." The ODWC reported that rifle hunters accounted for 58 percent of the total deer harvest for 2012. Data indicates 155,246 hunters headed to the field for the gun season, and almost 30 percent of all the deer harvested with a modern firearm last year were taken during opening weekend. â€œOver the rifle season, deer will associate the banging of rifles with danger, and either not come out at all during the day, or move to areas where it is safer for them,â€• Fairbanks said. â€œThe time to hunt is now, before the

deer catch on.â€•