Nature is calming medicine

My preparations for the upcoming gun deer season took me on a walk through the woods the other day.

While my purpose was to prepare my deer stand, I also needed the walk for therapeutic reasons. A busy work schedule and non- stop political ads and news had put my brain into overload mode.

I needed to unplug.

Nature provides the release that can’t be found by scrolling through endless social media feeds. The noise of nature quiets my soul.

I stopped to cross Little Creek, a spring-fed waterway that runs through our valley. The stream is  listed as a Class I trout water.

While the creek is too shallow to support trout year-round, it is used by brook trout in the fall for spawning – the process where trout lay eggs. Spawning season is triggered by water temperatures and trout swim upstream from Beaver Creek.

I heard some splashing as I neared the stream – signs that I had spooked some trout by my steps. I took a couple of steps back and waited.

Sure enough, the trout came out from under the streambank into the open water. I watched as several trout darted back and forth near a fallen log.

The female trout uses its tail fin to make a small depression in the streambed called a nest or a redd and the female and a male will release eggs and milt – or sperm – simultaneously.

The process is repeated upstream with additional redds until the trout is out of eggs. A trout can lay thousands of eggs, depending on its size. The eggs remain in the redds over the winter – kept alive by oxygen from the flowing water.

Then in the spring the small fish – called fry – will emerge. They will stay in the shallow stream seeking food and shelter until they are big enough to need deeper pools. The ones that survive and grow large enough will return to spawn in a year or two when they are mature.

I crossed the stream and headed into the woods. It’s the time of year for the fall breeding season for deer, also known as the rut. It’s a time of physiological, behavior and chemical changes for deer.

Bucks seek doe in estrus and they sometimes throw caution to the wind in their single-minded pursuit of breeding. That makes them move around more and present themselves as easier targets to hunters.

I’ve captured a few bucks on my security cameras, including one large 6-pointer who had some of his antlers broken off – either during a fight with another buck or because he was a little too vigorous in his attempts to scrape off the velvet. The light on the camera caught his attention and he came right up to the lens and snorted.

Even when we don’t see bucks, there are other signs of the rut. Bucks like to mark their territory. Rubs are when bucks rake their antlers on brush, small trees or saplings. They peel the bark and leave behind scents from their forehead glands.

Bucks also create scrapes by pawing a bare patch of ground, usually in an oval shape and often under trees. The buck leaves behind scent from a gland located between the toes of their front hooves and will sometimes urinate down the tarsal glands on their inner lower legs for some additional aroma.

The overheard branches or the ends of twigs are where bucks – and does – will chew and lick and deposit additional scent from their forehead and eye glands.

I spotted several rubs and some scrapes in the woods near my new deer stand, which I constructed from fallen tree branches. Of course it includes my traditional grill for keeping me warm.

I sat with my back against a tree and closed my eyes.

The rustling leaves, the wind blowing and the birds calling stilled my brain.

It was good medicine.

[Trout spawning in Little Creek in Jackson County, WI](https://youtu.be/GlsEj6p-2ss)

[Buck caught on camera](https://youtu.be/tj8vMWvQYAI)