



U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service

November 2009

Rice Lake's Disabled Deer Hunt Takes Center Stage



Special Hunting Edition

Plus:

State Private Lands Coordinators Announced for R3 Partners for FW Program

Roosevelt's Tree Army

2009 Duck Stamp Winner

Editor's Note:

Connecting with nature does not look the same for everyone. Connecting with nature means different things to different people. For some, it's hunting and fishing. For others, it's walking in the woods or on the beach. What does your nature encounter look like? We want to know. To that end, we have added a regular section called Let's Go Outside!

We invite you to submit personal nature encounters as experienced by you and your children, as well as innovative ideas on how to connect with nature. We will run your accounts in this feature segment.

Please submit your youngsters' stories and photos to our regular section: Kid's Corner. Kid's Corner features the nature writing and photographic pieces by the children of regional employees.

E-mail: valerie_redmond@fws.gov with your Let's Go Outside! and Kids Corner articles, photos, journal entries and poems.

On the Cover: Regional Director Tom Melius joins two hunters (a father and son team) at the Rice Lake disabled hunt for some fun. Photo by Walt Sauerbrei.

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Disabled Hunter Deer Hunts Bring Opportunity, Reconnection

This month I was honored to be a part of the third annual disabled hunter, deer hunt at Rice Lake National Wildlife Refuge (NWR). Regional disabled hunts are a great opportunity for people to get out and enjoy a hunting experience even though they're disabled. They are a priceless opportunity to reconnect folks who's circumstance have separated them from the natural environment they love and hold dear.

I was particularly impressed with one gentleman who used the opportunity not just to connect with nature, but with his son. As each one of these hunts teams a hunter with a non-disabled guide, he asked his 16-year-old son to accompany him for the day. He told me that this hunt was the only time that he and his son



Above: RD Tom Melius (l) shares some stories with one of the hunters (c) and Walt Ford (r). USFWS photo by Valerie Rose Redmond.



Above: Husband (c) and wife (l) team join RD Tom Melius (r) for some outdoor fun. Photo by Walt Sauerbrei.

could get out together and enjoy a hunt. The father also confessed that he didn't really care if he even saw a deer; just getting out and spending this time with his son was the true gift. It is clear to me that our efforts to host disabled hunts across the region offer an opportunity that may not be readily available to disabled members of the community. It's a wonderful occasion that I'm proud we are able to facilitate.

Another gentleman I talked with was an avid hunter who became disabled 10 years ago. Following his accident, he sold all of his guns because he never felt he'd be able to get out and do any deer hunting again. Four years ago he saw the announcement of the Rice Lake disabled hunt, and realized he had another chance to get out and experience an activity that had been hugely important in his earlier years. This same

gentleman called Walt Ford of Rice Lake, three months before this year's hunt was announced, to see if he'd been selected. He revealed that this hunt meant so much to him, it was literally keeping him going everyday.

Our regional hunts bring communities, friends groups and others around the refuge together for a common purpose. While we take it for granted everyday that we can just go out and walk in the woods, it's important to remember the unique opportunity our hunts provide the public.

Thanks for all you do,

--Tom Melius
Regional Director,
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
Midwest Region



The Buzz

State Private Lands Coordinators for Region 3's Partners for Fish and Wildlife program Announced

Spend a few minutes talking with the two new Partners for Fish and Wildlife, Private Lands State Coordinators, and it quickly becomes apparent that they are passionate about how private landowners manage their lands for wildlife.

Gwen Kolb, the new Illinois State Coordinator, began her career with the Service in the SCEP at Ottawa NWR. Her first permanent position was at Illinois River NWR where she served as the private lands

biologist. Several years later she transferred to the Illinois State Private Lands Office which has recently been moved to Springfield.

Kolb has her own personal mission statement which she says will guide her in her new position. "I am a steward of the land and I will help the American public become better stewards through, education, demonstration and proper implementation of policies and regulations," she says. "Without the landowner, none of the work I do could be possible. In this job I'll

Kraig McPeek at the head of the class. USFWS Photo.



have the opportunity to bring more partners into the mix."

Kraig McPeek, the Ohio state coordinator, began his federal career with the Army Corps of Engineers. He has worked in the Rock Island Ecological Services Office as a general biologist and private lands biologist.

"Along with on-the-ground activities that the Partners Program is known for," McPeek says, "I look forward to motivating and encouraging our partners to work with us so we can tackle issues like climate change and water consumption."

-- Cindy Samples, *External Affairs*



Above: Gwen Kolb working the land. USFWS Photo.

RD with Rice Lake's Walt Ford



1. Preparing for the ribbon cutting of the new trail. 2. Showing the ropes. 3. Gleaning important details from one of the hunters. 4. Enjoying the day. 5. Taking in the hunter's excitement. 6. Helping out.

USFWS photos by Valerie Rose Redmond.



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Morning Glory. Photo by Ted Koehler.

Roosevelt's Tree Army

When President Franklin D. Roosevelt took office after the nation's depression, the economy needed more than a boost--it needed new life. Roosevelt created many programs to put the nation back to work. One of these programs was the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC). Also known as Roosevelt's Tree Army, the CCC was tasked with saving the nation's natural resources while at the same time giving people a chance to work. Roosevelt's tree army built facilities, pulled up rail tracks, and performed other land conservation tasks, as well as planted trees. Cliff Sanbeck, 87 (black hat), Newman Jacobson, 92 (yellow hat), and Gordy Manchester, 85 (white hat), are vets of the historic tree army. As a symbol of respect, Walt Ford, refuge manager, invited the three to cut the ribbon for a new walking trail on the refuge. Read more at: <http://www.aitkinage.com/main.asp?SectionID=3&SubSectionID=75&ArticleID=32814>.

-- Valerie Rose Redmond
External Affairs



L to R: Cliff Sanbeck, Gordy Manchester, Newman Jacobson, Phillip Trujillo, RD Tom Mellus, Rice Lake National Wildlife Refuge Manager, Walt Ford. USFWS photo by Valerie Rose Redmond.



Above and Left: Ribbon cutting ceremony for a new walking trail at Rice Lake National Wildlife Refuge. Roosevelt tree army vets honored at the event. USFWS Photos by Valerie Rose Redmond.

Interior Secretary DeSoto Visit

Interior Secretary Ken Salazar Visits to DeSoto NWR and Gets A Closer Look Prior To Upcoming Recovery Act Improvements

When extended layovers between flights leaves some extra time on your hands, do you check out the airport gift shops? Have a meal and catch what's on the airport café television? Not, if you're Secretary of the Interior Ken Salazar.

On Sept. 28, when faced with spare time between connecting flights at the Omaha Airport, Secretary Salazar took advantage of the opportunity and close proximity of DeSoto National Wildlife Refuge (NWR). He used that time for a brief visit with refuge staff and volunteers to see the day-to-day operations and hear more about how American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (Recovery Act) dollars will soon bring change to the refuge.

"Refuge staff and representatives of the Friends of Boyer Chute and DeSoto National Wildlife Refuges were thrilled that the Secretary took time to visit us, and we are very thankful for his support of our Refuge," Acting Refuge Manager Dan Matiatos said.

He noted that the Secretary and those travelling with him visited with refuge staff and Friends Group volunteers, toured the Visitors Center which houses the historical Steamboat Bertrand Museum collection, and discussed the upcoming Recovery Act projects for DeSoto and Boyer Chute NWRs.



Above: Department of the Interior Secretary Ken Salazar views a map of Desoto NWR as he and Visitor Services Manager Sue McDonald discuss the refuge's history and the formation of Desoto Lake. USFWS photo.

"This visit gave the Secretary the chance to take in the natural beauty and serenity that we enjoy in our part of the country, whether looking out from our viewing galleries, or seeing the amazing historical collection of the Bertrand museum," Matiatos said. "It was a privilege to have him here and we are thrilled that he took the time to come out and show his appreciation for the hard work we all put into our refuge. It was a great day to show him even more of the national wildlife system that he works just as hard to lead and support."

Of great interest to the Secretary during his visit was a "before" look at the upcoming infrastructure and energy efficiency projects. The refuge received \$1.85 million in funding from the Recovery Act. The funding will be used to improve the energy efficiency of the refuge's visitor center and maintenance facilities, as well as providing employment opportunities for local youth.

"The Visitor Center is one of the larger energy users in the Region because of the special air conditioning and air handling requirements necessary to protect the thousands of 19th century objects from the Bertrand collection, either stored or on display at the Center," said Tom Worthington, Deputy Chief of National Wildlife Refuges in the Midwest. "The ARRA project will replace nearly 30 year-old windows, lots of them, with high-efficiency windows, and energy efficient light fixtures."

"The economic recovery investments that the Department of the Interior is making will create jobs by building trails, restoring habitat, upgrading visitors' centers, and protecting national treasures in communities across America, while leaving a lasting legacy for our children and grandchildren," said Secretary Salazar.

--Larry Dean, External Affairs



Color me fall. Photo by Valerie Rose Redmond.

Artists Quarter Helping Hands



When they arrive, they are excited and perhaps even a bit nervous, as for many it is the first time. Their nerves are quelled because they know that "we are here to help them" --Dave Bennett, Rydell NWR.

Volunteers at Columbia Fish and Wildlife Conservation Office work along side Service Employees to assist hunter Billy Walker after his successful hunt. USFWS Photo.

Artists Quarter 2009 Duck Stamp Winner

Robert Bealle an artist from Waldorf, Maryland, took top honors today at the 2009 Federal Duck Stamp Art Contest.

Bealle's painting of an American wigeon will be made into the 2010-2011 Federal Duck Stamp, which will go on sale in late June 2010. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service produces the Federal Duck Stamp, which sells for \$15 and raises about \$25 million each year to fund wetland habitat acquisition for the National Wildlife Refuge System.

Of the 224 entries in this year's contest, eight entries made it through to the final round of judging in the two-day art contest, the oldest and most prestigious wildlife art competition in America. Scot Storm of Freeport, Minn., placed second with his acrylic painting of a pair of wood ducks, and Jeffrey Mobley, of Tulsa, Okla., took third place with an acrylic painting of a gadwall.

"The magnitude of this moment has not escaped me," said Bealle, who has previously entered the Duck Stamp Contest numerous times. "I'm so humbled and appreciative of this. I just don't know what to say."

The Federal Duck Stamp Contest was held this year at the Patuxent Research Refuge in Laurel, Md. Service Director

Sam Hamilton announced the contest winner and congratulated Bealle – who was present at the contest judging -- on his achievement.

We recognize Robert Bealle and personally thank our distinguished panel of judges for their hard work on behalf of waterfowl conservation and the Federal Duck Stamp,"



2010-2011 Federal Duck Stamp.

said Sam Hamilton, Director of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. "This year's contest is particularly special for me because it is my first opportunity to take part in the contest as Fish and Wildlife Service Director, and I am honored to step into the shoes of the many past directors and play a role in this landmark program."

This year's five-judge panel included former Congressman Wayne Gilchrest, an active conservationist; Jeff Hedtke, a conservation in his personal and professional life as well as collection of duck stamps and

decoys, Marshall Jones, retired deputy director of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service; Peter Martin, a writer, editor and duck stamp expert; and Judith Warfield Price, a waterfowl art expert and Executive Director of the Waterfowl Festival in Easton, Maryland. The alternate judge was Evan Hirsche, president of the National Wildlife Refuge Association.

All waterfowl hunters age 16 and older are required to purchase and carry the current Migratory Bird Conservation and Hunting Stamp – commonly known as the Duck Stamp – but conservationists, stamp collectors and others also purchase the stamp in support of habitat conservation. Ninety-eight percent of the

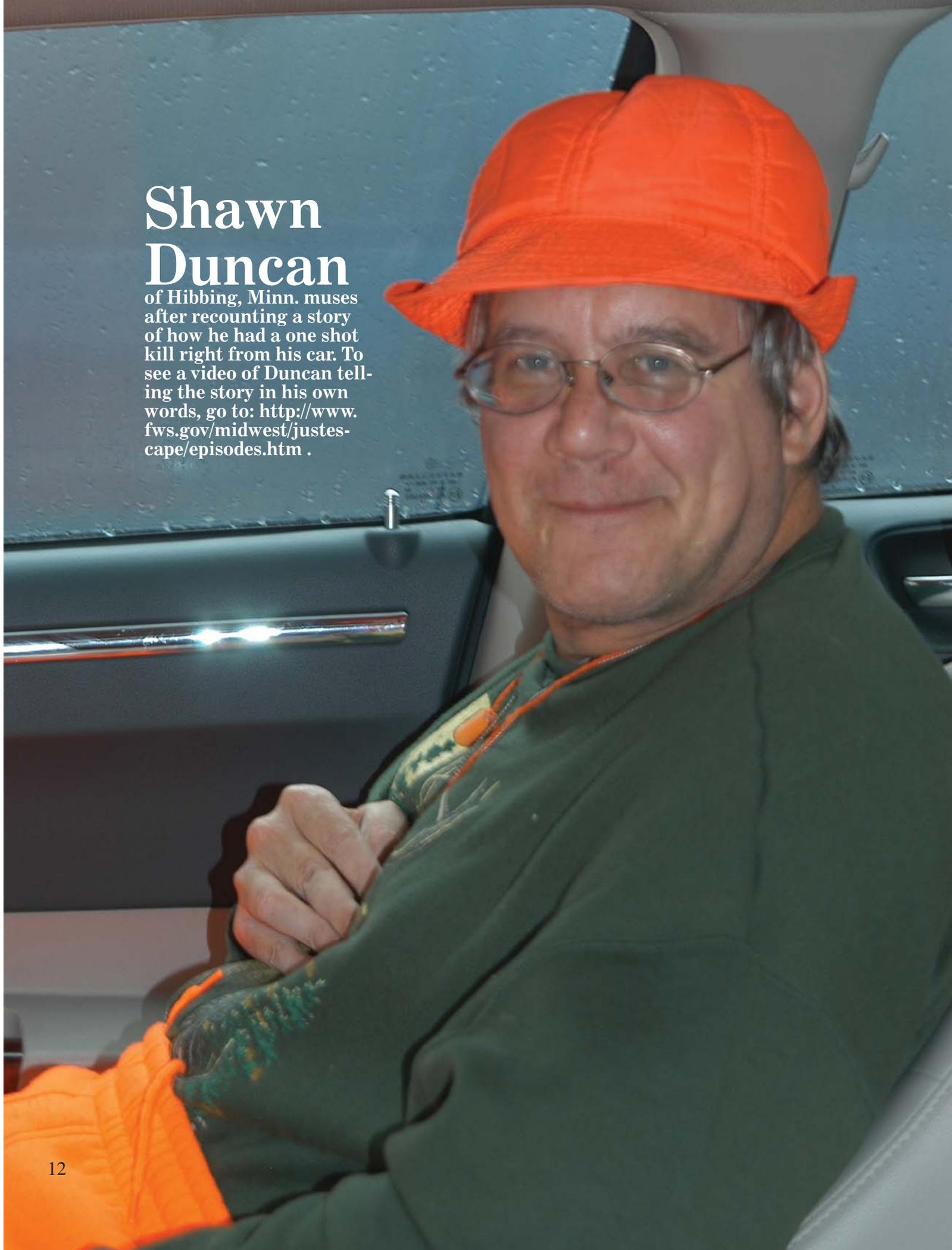
proceeds from the \$15 Duck Stamp go to the Migratory Bird Conservation Fund, which supports the purchase of acres of wetlands for inclusion into the National Wildlife Refuge System.

Since 1934, the Federal Duck Stamp program has raised more than \$750 million to purchase nearly six million acres of wildlife habitat for the Refuge System.

--Rachel F. Levin, Joshua Winchell, R9 External Affairs

Shawn Duncan

of Hibbing, Minn. muses after recounting a story of how he had a one shot kill right from his car. To see a video of Duncan telling the story in his own words, go to: <http://www.fws.gov/midwest/justes-cape/episodes.htm> .



Carey McWilliams (R) of Fargo, ND teamed with young Phillip Trujillo (L) on the firing range at Rice Lake who helped him aim and shoot with shoulder taps. Here the two pose for a shot after McWilliams recounts how he took down a buck. To see a video of McWilliams telling the story in his own words, go to: <http://www.fws.gov/midwest/just-escape/episodes.htm> .



Musings of an Upland Bird Hunter

Hunting, as an outdoor tradition, carries enormous cultural importance in the Midwest and other regions across the country. There are those who still hunt purely for meat, but in today's era most people hunt to be closer to nature, engage in sport or recreation, or derive social (i.e., familial) benefits associated with the activity.

Many waterfowlers are quite fanatical about finding time for the duck blind, almost regardless of weather. It's pretty much the same story with deer hunters once the rut starts. I certainly have my share of friends that love to sleep in on the weekends but have no problem rolling out of bed at o'-dark-thirty (if not before) to hunt turkeys in the early morning.

I have a deep and enduring appreciation for sportsmen and women who have logged a lot of hours setting up decoys, toting around portable tree stands, or honing their turkey calls. That said, I don't personally hunt waterfowl, deer, or turkeys (or lions, tigers and bears for that matter). It all sounds like good fun, but I have come to realize there just aren't enough hours in a week to hunt, fish, photograph, or otherwise harass every critter under the sun. Better to only pester a couple species and get good at it.

Ryan Aylesworth and dog Ole pause from the hunting to take a photo. USFWS Photo.



I hunt upland birds, mostly ruffed grouse and woodcock. I am most passionate about grouse hunting, although I often have success hunting woodcock in similar types of cover. Of course, in Maine (where I grew up) and other parts of New England that I hunted as a youth, people don't hunt grouse. Nope, they hunt "pah-tridge." But, hey, we could talk colloquialisms all day. Since moving to the Midwest I have also taken up pheasant hunting, but I tend to prefer woods to corn fields. Even though early successional forest (ideal grouse habitat) created by recent logging activity has clearly been touched by human hands, the landscape just feels wilder to me. I'm a fan of wild--at least the illusion of it.

For me, there is no better way to spend a fall or early-winter day than making the trek north and trudging around in a sleepy woodland of young aspen, mature oaks, fir trees, tamarack (if the

ground is soupy enough), and dense underbrush in search of some mystic north woods game birds. Even on days when the birds aren't cooperating I get a great deal of amusement from watching Ole, my German shorthaired pointer, zip around with boundless enthusiasm as he follows his nose wherever it leads. Over time he's gotten pretty good at following my commands, but occasionally a scent trail and his curiosity trump what I'm asking of him. Fortunately for me his nose hasn't led him to a porcupine or skunk yet, emphasis on yet.

I have been hunting upland birds since I was about 12. Unlike most of my peers growing up, I was introduced to hunting by a family friend rather than a relative. As my family owned a fly fishing business, my father is an avid trout fisherman and we spent countless hours on the river together. Unfortunately, however, he has never been much of a "hunter", per se. That said, I will give him a pass because he just might be the best dad the world has ever seen.

Clichéd as it is to say, I actually do remember my first grouse hunting experience like it was yesterday. It was a brisk October day and we had started the morning hunting along the edge of a recent clear cut before eventually wandering

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Youth and the Recovery Act An Experience to Last a Lifetime

A collection of youth in the Midwest found that banding geese and wading in a river collecting aquatic plants qualified as a summer job. The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) provided funding to allow these experiences to happen.

“I had always admired them from a far, but actually getting a chance to hold one was an amazing experience,” wrote one Youth Conservation Corps (YCC) enrollee about their goose banding experience on Upper Mississippi River National Wildlife and Fish Refuge in Wisconsin. Another enrollee wrote, “That experience will last me a lifetime!”

Ron Fisher, Assistant Manager at Illinois River National Wildlife and Fish Refuge commented, “I think some of the more fun days for our YCC enrollees were when they were involved in their environmental education activities.” Fisher coordinated two YCC crews throughout the summer. Most of their work involved maintenance, including helping pour the foundation for a bunkhouse and repairing accessible trails.

On the Upper Mississippi River National Wildlife and Fish Refuge YCC Crew Leader

YCC enrollee Erin Kelly banding a Canada goose. USFWS Photo.



Arena Bark taught her YCC crew about scientific study protocol. Then they jumped in the river and started diving under the water to collect wild celery. Each youth was asked to file a program evaluation. One of the youth wrote, “I enjoyed [the most] diving on Lake Onalaska for the Wild Celery Survey.” As you can imagine a hot summer day spent working “in the river” was a special memory. .

Bill Thrune, Wildlife Refuge Specialist commented, “I’m a graduate of a program called the Neighborhood Youth Corps and it was probably my first foot in the door to my career. I would call it my first real job. I imagine some of our YCC enrollees may pursue a career in conservation after their summer job experience, just like I did.”

YCC experiences offers an experience to last a lifetime and a career in the making.
-- Cindy Samples
External Affairs

Hunting Musing Continued.

into a stand of pole-size aspen and alders with a dense understory. I flushed my first grouse out of patch of brambles in a forest opening. The bird escaped with little more than a scare, but what a rush. I was hooked. Fellow upland bird hunters can attest to the adrenaline surge one experiences after a grouse unexpectedly bursts from a well-concealed spot on the forest floor. Even if you hunt with a dog, as I typically do, you can only be so ready for the cacophonous explosion of a flushing grouse. In my opinion, there are few phenomena that appear so clumsy and graceful at the same time. And, of course, for every bird that flushes, I get the sense there are many more that hunker down and watch dog and hunter move right on by. Let’s face it, Ole isn’t perfect. Then again, neither is his owner.

Regardless of how much “success” I have on a given day, it is always a special feeling to walk amongst these iconic symbols of the north woods. I hope any future children I have will feel the same way. Days spent in the field serve as compelling reminders - not that I often need them - of why I am so fortunate to work for a conservation agency.

--Ryan Aylesworth
External Affairs

Human Nature: Midwest Disabled Hunts on Target

For disabled persons and the seemingly endless flow of community volunteers that eagerly offer their services and wares, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) Midwest National Wildlife Refuge (NWR) disability hunts are more than just a harvest of game, it's an exercise in the best of human nature—respect, dignity, joy and compassion.

For many of the participants it is the first time since their injury that they have had the opportunity to finally be out in the woods again. It's the first chance to be back in the field since their injury. Severe disabilities and transportation issues make it difficult for them to get outdoors. Family members are either unable or unwilling to take them out. "We help people to revisit a privilege they used to have in life in being outdoors," says Dave Bennett, refuge manager for the 2,200 acre Rydell NWR. "We introduce them to an activity that they used to be able to do and now, while it is still limited, they again can feel the excitement of hunting or the ability to be outdoors and see nature first hand again."

Refuge hunt volunteers service up to 20 deer hunters with a range of disabilities, from blindness to quadriplegics. While the hunters use various support mechanisms to hunt with including, personal aides and air blow tubes, the event is more about the deer camp experience. The hunters socialize, dine on venison, play cards, and tell stories. Sometimes they just enjoy nature, even if it's just sitting



Carey McWilliams (l) and Randall Gebhard (r) standing with their aide, Ray Milward (c) give tangible proof that regional hunts are right on target. USFWS Photo by Valerie Rose Redmond.

in the woods alone. It's a kind of peace, serenity and healing that non-disabled people have access to, but more often than not, take for granted.

Disabled hunters relish this opportunity. It's an opportunity that the hunters have been longing for and look forward to. When they arrive they are excited and perhaps even a bit nervous, as for many it is the first time. But their nerves are quelled because they know that "we are here to help them," says Bennett.

The character of the deer camp exhibited what is a universal theme of sorts around other regional disabled hunts. It was as if the harvesting of a deer was secondary, almost irrelevant. More important than the bagging of a deer was the camaraderie, self sufficiency, personal satisfaction and peace experienced by hunters—something that would not be possible were it not for the Service disabled hunt program.

Bennett recounts a story of a hunter who had suffered a severe stroke six years prior to the hunt. The stroke rendered him with very limited speech ability and with severe pain whenever he was touched. His mobility was by wheel chair. "After we tucked him into a blind", says Bennett, "without having said a word, his hand was twitching with enthusiasm. He was so elated, he could hardly stand it for the excitement he had." Later the hunter was able to communicate to Bennett and the refuge volunteers that it was the first time in six years that he had been out in the woods.

Rydell's Minnesota State award winning disability program is American Disability Act (ADA) regulation compliant. But Rydell, which has the most accessible refuge in the nation, is only one NWR in a number around the

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Human Nature: Midwest Disabled Hunts on Target

region that features a disability program.

In early October, the third annual Rice Lake NWR took center stage with its disabled deer hunt in McGregor, Minn. Headed up by refuge manager, Walt Ford, the event attracted 20 hunters from around the region, including Shawn Duncan a hemiplegic from Hibbing, Minn. and two blind hunters, Carey McWilliams of Fargo, N.D. and Randall Gebhard of Moorhead, Minn., all of whom have tagged deer despite their disabilities. (Hear firsthand accounts of their stories at: <http://www.fws.gov/midwest/justescape/episodes.htm> and see more pictures of these



Shawn Duncan patiently waits in the car for his aide to bring his wheel chair. USFWS Photo by Valerie Rose Redmond.

“paying it forward”, Ford says. “These guys have some real issues that they have to deal with at times and that’s why we do this hunt,” he said.

“These guys have some real issues that they have to deal with at times and that’s why we do this hunt.”

*-- Walt Ford
Rice Lake NWR*

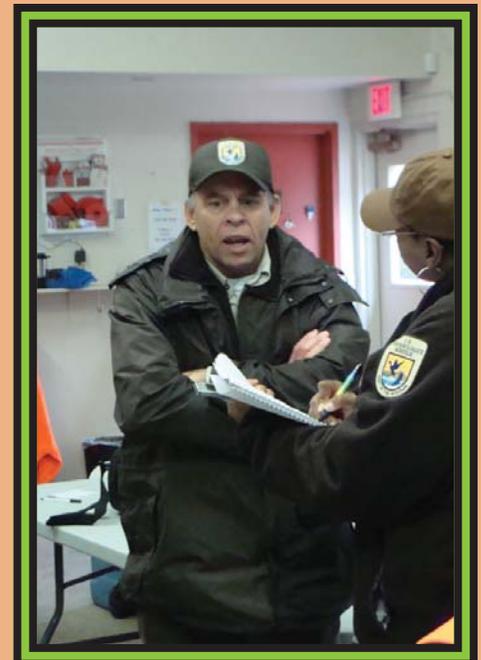
hunters on pages 12 and 13.). The hunters are thrilled about being outdoors. For the volunteers and refuge workers it’s an exercise in

The emotion in Ford’s eyes spoke of human compassion, more than what his words let on. It was human nature at its best—people helping people. “This is just a great opportunity for people to get out and enjoy a hunting experience

even though they’re disabled,” added Tom Melius who attended the Rice Lake hunt.

Inclement weather deterred some of the hunters, but others braved the relentless down pour. Community partnerships helped pull off the event despite the weather by providing hot meals, support and by cleaning the mechanics shed that was the venue for the deer camp. Ford worked with Minewawa Sportsman Club and Options, a nonprofit organization that empowers and finds opportunities for people with disabilities, among others. Ron Richardson of Minewawa explains that participants are transported via ATVs and 2-wheel trailers that are rigged to handle wheel chairs.

Continued on last page.



Walt Ford (L) gives a reporter (R) his views on disabled hunts. USFWS Photo.

In Their Own Words...

Tim Omlid, Hunter Gary, Minn.

Being a T3,4, paraplegic and being able to go out with others with similar disabilities and some worse, in a controlled environment like it is at Rydell, and have a chance to put some venison in the freezer is just a fantastic deal. It gives us all a sense of fulfillment and just I don't know makes us all feel better.

Robert Dibb, Volunteer

Drives 4 hours to volunteer with their 2 children for the Rydell hunt.

The drive is not a huge deal. We're willing to do that. It's definitely worth it to help hunters who are there continue their heritage of hunting. They are able to get out there... they need a little help but...they are doing what they love. I know I love it. It's a great thing.

Carey McWilliams, Hunter Fargo, N.D.

I just got back from a successful hunt where I did get an eight point 160 pound buck here in North Dakota, and two pheasants. In fact, it was so much meat they're bringing it to me. Hunting is a sport that's closed off to disabled individuals. When these organizations do these hunts it opens up windows that are previously closed. And it brings you on more of a level playing field with other people, which is found rarely in other parts of our lives.

Bob Platt, Hunter Ada, Minn.

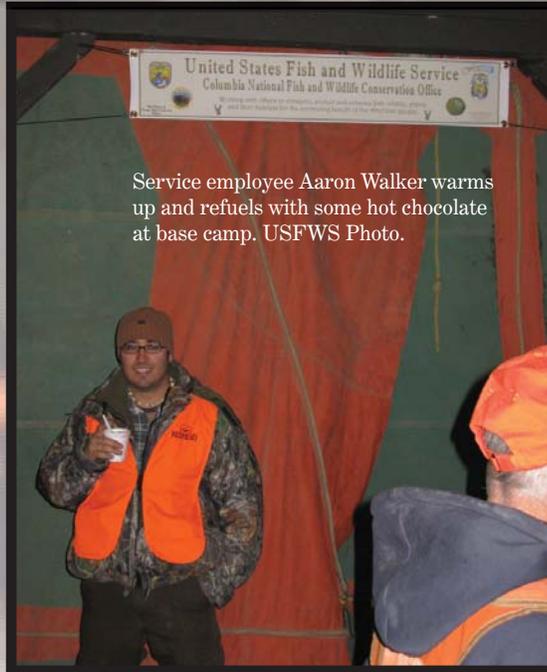
The thing that means the most to me is getting a little of my independence back. And the reason I say that is those guys that run that up there know how to help you when you need help but what you can do for yourself, they let you do, which is really great.

Distinguishing Characteristics of Regional Disabled Hunts

The primary objective for disabled hunts is the same—to help disabled sportsmen enjoy an opportunity that they might not have otherwise had. While organized hunts around the region at our national wildlife refuges (NWRs) and wetland management districts (WMDs) have a common purpose, they feature varying degrees of characteristics. Some distinguish themselves by type of coordinated partnerships, outreach methods, transportation logistics, and the advice they lend to others who wish to facilitate a disabled hunt. Others differ by number of hunters they accommodate, game availability and type. Still others may simply feature accessible blinds, but not full blown organized hunts.

The number of disabled deer hunters utilizing the blinds and attending the hunts across the region depends on factors like accessibility and staff availability. Squaw Creek has 5, Ottawa 8, Shiawassee 35, Swan Lake 10, DeSoto 15, Crab Orchard 55, and Mingo 45. Rice Lake limits it to 20 and Swan Lake limits it to 10.

At Squaw Creek, disabled hunters are allowed to take two deer. The refuge has a dinner for the hunters on Friday night and also provides lunches on Saturday and Sunday. Crab Orchard allows hunters to hunt waterfowl, dove and deer. At Mingo hunters chase deer, feral hog, turkey and squirrel. Shiawassee, Ottawa and Swan Lake all look for deer, while DeSoto also adds turkey into the mix.



Service employee Aaron Walker warms up and refuels with some hot chocolate at base camp. USFWS Photo.

Detroit Lakes WMD has 5 hunting blinds installed on waterfowl production areas (WPAs) that were erected primarily for deer hunting for people with disabilities.

In 2006 the Fergus Falls WMD established three accessible blinds for hunters on three (Nicholson, Odens & Bah Lakes) WPAs. These blinds are primarily for waterfowl hunting and are open for use during the entire fall waterfowl season held by the state of Minnesota. These blinds may be reserved by calling the visitor services staff at 998-4480. “We have had limited use of these blinds,” says Kevin Brennan. “I would say we have 2-3 individuals use these blinds each year.”

Dave Bennett of the Rydell NWR says Rydell has the most accessible refuge in the nation. Rydell’s

Minnesota State award winning disability program is American Disability Act (ADA) regulation compliant.

John Benson of Swan Lake says the refuge gives hunting opportunity to 10 individuals in wheel chairs. Blinds are set up in areas where they know there will be deer activity and there is easy access from a vehicle. They limit hunters to 10. Hunting at Swan Lake is a heavily sought after opportunity, Benson says, because hunters are almost certain to harvest a deer. “A lot of them harvest their deer on the first day,” he says.

Diane Kitchen of Horicon NWR says the refuge offers two shotgun deer hunts, one during the first week of October which is a date that the state has established for this hunt and one during the traditional gun deer season during Thanksgiving week. Both hunts are nine days in length but in recent years they’ve split the nine days into three 3-day hunts so that they could accommodate more hunters. The refuge started the November hunt in 1994 and the October hunt in 2000. In both hunts, hunters are allowed to have an assistant.

Tracy Hill says that Columbia FWCO staff guide hunters to pre-set wheelchair-accessible hunting blinds. Each hunter uses a cell phone to maintain contact with a base camp for regular safety check-ins and

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Distinguishing Characteristics of Regional Disabled Hunts

support. Columbia FWCO helped hunters move among blinds, tracked deer that had been shot, and accommodated support to hunters. The Service worked alongside over 100 other volunteers to help make this event a success. From transporting hunters and processing deer to preparing fantastic home cooked meals for everyone.

Thirty-eight hunters traveled from all parts of Missouri and several states to take part in this annual two-day hunt. There were 29 deer harvested from the 3,200 acre special hunt area.

Cathy Henry of Detroit Lakes Wetland Management District (WMD) says they send out news releases and work with Options (resource center for independent living). Friends of Detroit Lakes WMD constructed and helped place the blinds. Options out of Grand Forks helped to advertise them. Brennan of Fergus Falls WMD utilizes news releases for their outreach. Kitchen says they publicize their hunts each year by a news release. Each year, they have more and more hunters apply, many of whom have returned. This year in the October hunt, they had 37 hunters sign up, with 21 of them were new. Still others handle outreach through local sportsmen's groups, news paper articles, and Friends Groups.

Partners are an integral part of disabled hunts in both supplying assistance and expertise. Some of the partners that are used across the region include: Wild Turkey



Above: Hunter Billy Walker arrives at his afternoon hunting spot with his wife. Service Employee Aaron Walker assists in getting him settled in the blind. USFWS Photo.

Federation, Wheelin' Sportsmen, Women in the Outdoors, Pheasants Forever, Ducks Unlimited, Paralyzed Veterans of America, and Numerous Friends Groups. Horicon partners with The Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources.

Transportation needs vary depending on the landscape of the refuges. "[In] most areas, the hunter along with their partner can drive to the general area and then access blinds, etc., along accessible trails," says Mindy Sheets, Assistant Refuge Manager at DeSoto National Wildlife Refuge (NWR). "The refuge along with the partners give assistance where needed to assure hunters get to the appropriate hunting area." At Horicon the hunters are allowed to drive their vehicles on any road, dike or mowed path. The area where the hunt is located has a

two mile dike, plenty of mowed paths, and several roads. The refuge has six accessible blinds for their use, where hunters can drive right up to the blind. About half of the hunters use the blinds. The others choose to walk, use a portable blind, or hunt from their vehicle. Right now the blinds are first come first serve, but that may change. Columbia FWCO uses transport vehicles that were donated by local ATV dealers to get hunters to their hunting spots.

When asked what advice they would lend to others who were considering hosting a disability hunt, regional employees had the following to say:

"Providing these blinds on a few WPAs is relatively simple and inexpensive. Providing opportunities to disabled hunters has been positive for this field station." – Kevin Brennan

"Do it!! It is the most rewarding thing I have done." – Mindy Sheets

"Involve the hunters when you set it up and get their feedback. We had hunters show us where good locations would be for the blinds. We've changed things over the years as well, based on their feedback." –Diane Kitchen

"Appoint one person to coordinate and manage the event. Plan on it taking up most of their time the week leading up to the hunt." –Tracy Hill

--Valerie Rose Redmond
External Affairs

Staff Behind the Disabled Hunts

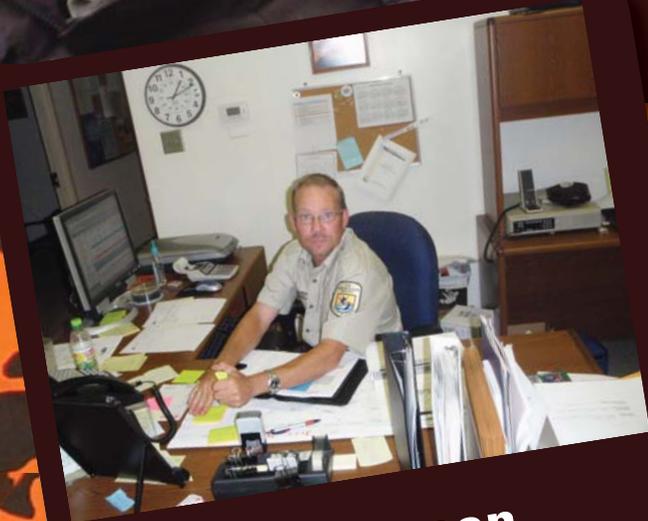
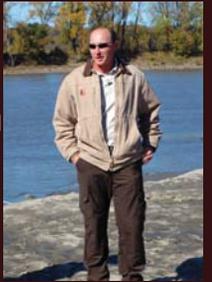


Walt Ford

These guys have some real issues that they have to deal with at times and that's why we do this hunt.

Clayton Ridenour

It is very rewarding to work with this group and inspiring to witness how persons with disabilities confront their unique challenges to experience the outdoors.



John P. Benson

Hunting at Swan Lake NWR is a highly sought after opportunity because hunters are almost certain to harvest a big deer.



Kevin Brennan

Providing opportunities to disabled hunters has been positive for this field station. Those who have used the blinds appreciate us providing them. Providing these blinds on a few WPAs is relatively simple and inexpensive.

Cathy Henry

We have five hunting blinds installed on Waterfowl Production Areas primarily for deer hunting for people with disabilities. Some could also be used for waterfowl hunting. Our Friends group made and installed them. We have not had any use yet.

Mindy Sheets

Hunters are exuberant when they come to a refuge hunt. They do not care if they harvest an animal. Just to be out and hunting and feeling normal brings them such joy. Many of these hunters have not been able to be out and doing things they use to do. So these opportunities are very important to them.

Staff Behind the Disabled Hunts



Diane Kitchen

This hunt is successful even when no one gets a deer! The hunters are so grateful for the opportunity and just enjoy being out there and seeing other wildlife. We have received nothing but positive comments on these hunts over the years.

On Hunts at Horicon

I received this letter from a hunter's wife:

"Dear Diane, you were so special to Ray and I a year ago November when he hunted for the last time around headquarters. Ray died November 17, 1996. We would have celebrated our 50th on May 30th if he were still with me. Once again, I want to thank you for making his year of deer hunting so special. Sincerely, Elaine Martin"



Tracy Hill

I feel the hunt is a success because it involves collaboration from a truly diverse group of people. This hunt serves as an important vehicle for the Service to accomplish its mission and communicate it to the American People.

Anne Sittauer

Sherburne National Wildlife Refuge Complex: The blinds for hunters with disabilities have been in use at Sherburne Refuge since 1994. The hunters with disabilities that use these blinds know what they are getting and have come to rely on this area for an economical and consistent hunt. For the most part the hunters that use these blinds are from the local area and if we didn't provide these blinds they would not go hunting. It is great to see some folks come back year after year to experience hunting.



Dave Bennett

We help people to revisit a privilege they used to have to have a life in being outdoors.

Mindy Sheets

Advice: Do it!! It is the most rewarding thing I have done.

Hunting News



A special thanks goes out to all the volunteers who helped during the 2009 Options/Rydell National Wildlife Refuge Accessible Hunt. USFWS Photo.

Rydell

The Rydell NWR special hunts went very well this year. Seventeen youth participated in the 2009 youth hunt and 18 hunters participated in the Accessible Hunt for People with Disabilities. Nine youth hunters harvested a deer and six hunters with disabilities harvested a deer. Overall everyone enjoyed themselves and best of all everyone kept a positive attitude and everyone came home safely. Thanks once again to the DNR for supporting the Rydell NWR on our past present and future special hunting opportunities.

-- Juancarlos Giese



10th Annual Hunt for Hunters with Disabilities at Horicon National Wildlife Refuge

Every year the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources offers an extra opportunity for hunters with disabilities to hunt deer by setting aside the first nine days in October as a season. Landowners, including the refuge, can sign themselves up as a sponsor to allow hunters on their land. For the tenth year, Horicon National Wildlife Refuge has set aside an 880 acre area for this hunt. This year, refuge staff decided to split the nine-day season into three 3-day seasons so that more hunters could be accommodated. Each three-day season was limited to 15 hunters and their assistants, who are not allowed to hunt. Six blinds were available for their use, but hunters were not restricted to the blind. Many of them set up portable blinds or hunt from their vehicle. A total of 37 hunters signed up for the hunt. Seven hunters ended up not participating for a variety of reasons. Out of the remaining 30 hunters, 3 does and 2 bucks were harvested. --Diane Kitchen, R3-Horicon



Youngsters learn about animal tracks at Crab Orchard National Wildlife Refuge hunting and fishing days. USFWS Photo.

Crab Orchard

Crab Orchard National Wildlife Refuge partnered with John A. Logan College to present the 22nd annual Southern Illinois Hunting and Fishing Days event. With attendance topping 30,000 over the two days, this event is the largest of its kind in the state.

Visitors to the event enjoyed a dozen different outdoor activities including shooting clays, fox hunting and a buck skinners village. There was plenty to see and do. Kids could try their hand at catching one of three thirty pound catfish or shooting a BB gun. Adults could learn fishing tips from the Illinois Department of Natural Resources fisheries department or try their skill at trap shooting. The Refuge sponsored the kids' 3-D archery tent.

There were also many competitions throughout the day. The dock dogs made a big splash and the goose and waterfowl calling could be heard throughout the event grounds. Young wildlife artists were also recognized for their talents.

For those who like to shop and check out the latest sporting goods, there were nearly 150 vendors on site. --Kimberly King-Wrenn, R3-Crab Orchard

Let's Go Outside!

The Hunt is On...



Hunters Behind

Tagging Game



the Disabled Hunts

Location, Location, Location

Crab Orchard, Cypress Creek, Big Oaks, DeSoto, Shiawasse

Midwest Hunting Season

Crab Orchard

National
Wildlife Refuge

Cypress Creek

National
Wildlife Refuge

Big Oaks

National
Wildlife Refuge

DeSoto

National
Wildlife Refuge

Shiawasse

National
Wildlife Refuge



Hunters in southern Illinois enjoy a rich tradition of hunting on public lands. Crab Orchard NWR contributes to this public opportunity with excellent hunting for a variety of species. The deer hunt is especially well known, as deer are abundant and success rates are high. Before the deer season starts, refuge volunteers set up temporary blinds around the refuge. These are used for a shotgun hunt reserved for hunters with disabilities and youth hunting. About 75 percent of participants in these hunts take a deer. A general shotgun hunt is conducted later in the season. A controlled Canada goose hunt includes blinds that are issued by lottery throughout the season.

Known by many as the "Illinois Bayou," the area that encompasses Cypress Creek NWR is undoubtedly one of the most unique natural areas in the state and is home to waterfowl, deer, turkey, squirrel, rabbit and other game species. The area includes a diversity of habitats from floodplain and upland forest, to deepwater swamp and shallow wetlands, to agriculture and early successional fields. The refuge includes 16,000 acres open to hunting. The Bellrose Waterfowl Reserve is managed as a resting and feeding area for migrating ducks. It is open for goose hunting after the end of duck season. Visit the refuge Web site for special regulations.

A former U.S. Army ordnance testing range, Big Oaks NWR includes the largest unfragmented forest area in southeast Indiana and one of the largest grasslands in the state. The refuge has healthy deer and turkey populations, and holds well-managed hunts, issued by state or refuge lottery. Deer hunters can choose archery or shotgun seasons. For both deer and turkey hunts, hunters are assigned a specific area and must enter the refuge with a partner. A compass is also required of all hunters. The hunts include numerous regulations to ensure safety and quality; check the refuge web site for the latest details.

One of the most visible species at DeSoto NWR is the wild turkey. Large numbers of these birds roam nearly every corner of the refuge. The refuge's spring hunts are especially designed for those with disabilities (refuge blinds are made available to disabled hunters) and young hunters. Both hunts have good success rates. An archery-only hunt is also available to the general public for those who want to try for one of the refuge's many gobblers. Quality deer hunting—including archery and muzzle loader hunts—round out the excellent opportunities at this refuge along the Missouri River.

Known locally as the "Shiawassee Flats," this refuge lies in the Saginaw Bay watershed, historically one of the largest wetland areas in Michigan. Shiawassee NWR has protected important waterfowl habitat, and each fall many bird species land here during migration. Among these birds are Canada geese, and each fall hunters use refuge blinds during a high-quality controlled hunt. Drawings for blinds are held each morning, and up to three hunters may occupy a blind. Hunters may be in the field until noon. The refuge also hosts a thriving deer population, making for a popular deer hunt.

Location, Location, Location

Agassiz, Big Stone, Minnesota Valley, Rydell, Sherburne

Midwest Hunting Season

Agassiz

National
Wildlife Refuge

Big Stone

National
Wildlife Refuge

Minnesota Valley

National
Wildlife Refuge

Rydell

National
Wildlife Refuge

Sherburne

National
Wildlife Refuge



Agassiz NWR, MN

The forests and wetlands of this northwestern Minnesota refuge are known by outdoors enthusiasts across the nation as one of the continent's best wildlife watching areas. Each year, thousands of waterfowl nest here, including giant Canada goose, canvasback and ruddy duck. Wolves and moose roam the forests. Hunters can enjoy this "wildlife wonderland" while pursuing white-tailed deer on the refuge. While the northern forests don't have the deer densities found in many parts of the country, Agassiz NWR does offer a real adventure for hunters who want to get away from the crowds.

Big Stone NWR, MN

A variety of species can be hunted on Big Stone NWR, but most hunters come here to pursue pheasant. On a good year, sportsmen find birds throughout the grassland habitat that surrounds the refuge's marshes and lakes. The first two weekends of the season can be crowded, but hunters who come later in the season will still find plenty of pheasant. A hunter willing to put in some effort should have a decent chance of taking a deer as well. An often-overlooked opportunity is turkey hunting. Few turkey hunters visit the refuge, but those who do have good success.

Minnesota Valley NWR, MN

The Minnesota Valley NWR is a hunter's getaway from the urban and suburban areas of Minneapolis and St. Paul. The refuge is located in a green belt of large marsh areas, bordered by office buildings, highways, residential areas and grain terminals. While this may seem like an unusual place for hunting, the refuge lands allow hunters to get away from the city noise and experience wild country near home. Comprised of eight main units totaling over 14,000 acres, the refuge encompasses 45 miles of the Minnesota River.

Rydell NWR, MN

Hunters who participate in the annual deer hunts at Rydell NWR know to expect interesting habitat, abundant deer and uncrowded conditions. But this refuge offers more than a quality deer hunt; it instructs young hunters and provides great opportunities for hunters with disabilities. The youth hunt is held each fall for 20 lucky hunters. First, the young hunters take a course that expands on what they learn in hunter safety, with such topics as orienteering, tracking and field dressing. The youth hunters then go into the field with mentors.

Sherburne NWR, MN

The St. Francis River Valley is considered one of the finest natural areas in Minnesota. However, by the 1920s, a ditch system drained much of the land for agricultural production. Sportsmen and other citizens organized in 1965 to protect and restore wetlands in this area. This effort led to the creation of Sherburne NWR. Hunters can enjoy a number of opportunities on the refuge. Area B is open to waterfowl and other migratory birds during the state season. Areas A and B are open to upland game and deer archery during the state seasons. Areas A, B and C are open to deer firearms during the state season.

Location, Location, Location

Ottawa, Leopold, Necedah, Trempealeau, Squaw Creek

Midwest Hunting Season

Ottawa

National
Wildlife Refuge

Leopold

Wetland Management
District

Necedah

National
Wildlife Refuge

Trempealeau

National
Wildlife Refuge

Squaw Creek

National
Wildlife Refuge



Ottawa NWR, OH

Located along a major flight path for puddle ducks and Canada geese, Ottawa NWR draws these waterfowl with shallow wetland impoundments along Lake Erie. Hunters participating in refuge day hunts - administered by mail in lottery four days a week - know they can expect good flights of birds throughout the season. With only 12 blinds, pressure is light for hunters who draw a permit. Day hunts for deer are also issued via lottery, with opportunities for youth, archery and shotgun hunters available. Typically, the refuge offers 10 hunting units, and hunters may apply in groups of three.

Leopold WMD, WI

Named after great conservationist and writer Aldo Leopold, the Leopold WMD protects habitat in some of the most important wetland areas in Wisconsin. Covering 17 southeastern Wisconsin counties, the district includes 53 waterfowl production areas (WPAs) totaling 12,000 acres. Most are open to public hunting per Wisconsin regulations. The WPAs include small wetlands surrounded by grasslands and wooded areas. Various species of ducks and geese use the areas on their fall migrations, and if weather conditions are favorable, hunting can be good. Deer and turkey are also common on many of the WPAs.

Necedah NWR, WI

The largest public hunting area near Madison and Milwaukee, Necedah NWR has become a popular destination for many Wisconsin deer hunters. As many as 2,000 deer hunters visit the 45,000-acre refuge on opening day, with many returning year after year. While turkey hunting is not nearly as popular, the refuge has a healthy population of birds that appears to be increasing. The spring season is a particularly good time to catch a gobbler. Necedah offers a wide range of hunting opportunities on limited parts of the refuge. Nearly the entire refuge is opened for the deer firearms season.

Trempealeau NWR, WI

Hunters with disabilities have a special opportunity to enjoy a duck hunt on the backwaters and large wetlands of Trempealeau NWR. The hunt is a weekend event, usually held in October, that allows hunters with disabilities access via special boats or portable blinds set up along dikes. Currently, this is the only waterfowl hunt on the refuge. Special registration is required. A limited deer hunt, with permits issued by lottery, is held during the state firearms season in November. The 6,200-acre refuge is located in an area with one of the highest deer densities in Wisconsin, but hunting success rates here are often low.

Squaw Creek NWR, MO

The mix of wetlands, grasslands and croplands on Squaw Creek NWR creates perfect habitat for a variety of waterfowl species. It is also perfect cover for a thriving deer population. That's why the refuge holds a special white-tailed deer hunt in January. While there are a limited number of permits available, those lucky enough to draw one can expect a very successful and enjoyable hunt. The muzzle loader hunt is consistently rated as one of the best-managed hunts in the state. Hunters may take antlerless deer only. The refuge has also been attracting as many as 300,000 snow geese each winter.

Location, Location, Location

Swan Lake, Mingo, Rice Lake, Fergus Falls, Columbia

Midwest Hunting Season

Swan Lake

National
Wildlife Refuge

Mingo

National
Wildlife Refuge

Rice Lake

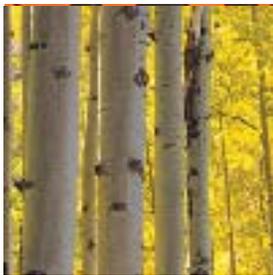
National
Wildlife Refuge

Fergus Falls

Wetland Management
District

Columbia

Fish and Wildlife
Conservation Office



Swan Lake NWR, MO

Swan Lake NWR was created to protect habitat for ducks and prairie chickens. Geese were rare visitors until 1941 when 800 Canada geese wintered at the refuge. Over the years, the refuge gradually attracted more and more geese. Today, from 10,000 to 80,000 Canada geese can be found on the refuge annually. A goose-only hunt is held with specified blinds or blind sites assigned to hunters via a morning drawing. Up to four hunters may hunt in one group. Check with refuge office for the latest regulations.

Mingo NWR, MO

Mingo National Wildlife Refuge has a designated hunting area which consists of 8,960 acres and an additional 6,891 acres during the Managed Muzzle load Deer Hunt. Hunting opportunities include archery deer and turkey, spring firearms turkey, and squirrel hunting. Waterfowl hunting is permitted in Pool 8, a 1,191 - acre green tree reservoir. The unit is managed through a cooperative agreement with the Missouri Department of Conservation as a wade-in hunting area.

Rice Lake NWR, MN

Rice Lake NWR holds an annual disabled hunter deer hunt in early October. The refuge partners with Options (a nonprofit organization that empowers and finds opportunities for people with disabilities). The participants are generally limited to 20. Visit the refuge website for more details.

In 2006 the Fergus Falls WMD established three accessible blinds for hunters on three (Nicholson, Odens & Bah Lakes) Waterfowl Production Areas. These blinds are primarily for waterfowl hunting and are open for use during the entire fall waterfowl season held by the state of MN. These blinds maybe reserved by calling the visitor services staff at 998-4480.

The annual event is a deer hunt reserved for persons with disabilities. Columbia FWCO staff participate by guiding hunters to pre-set wheelchair-accessible hunting blinds. Each hunter uses cell a phone to maintain contact with a base camp for regular safety check-ins and support. Columbia FWCO helps hunters move among blinds, tracks deer that have been shot, and accommodates support to hunters.

Around the Region

Deer Camp At Rice Lake



Above: Disabled hunters, volunteers and Service organizers enjoy camaraderie. USFWS Photos by Valerie Rose Redmond.



Quote of the Month

“The richness I achieve comes from nature, the source of my inspiration.” --*Claude Monet*

Disabled Hunts Continued

He says that the hunters tell him that this hunt gives them a chance that they never would have had and they can't get over how much fun it is.

Ford tells of an innovative partnership with FLOE International, manufacturer of lifts, docks and trailers, that was made possible via a Challenge Cost Share Grant. He explained to the manufacturer that he had a need for some equipment that would allow a stand to have a pull out area that would raise a hunter six feet into the air. The manufacturer first designed a prototype and then implemented several design modifications. The refuge purchased three stands as a result.

“Partners are an integral part of disabled hunts in both supplying assistance, expertise, and just the exuberant vitality that they bring,” says Mindy Sheets, Assistant Refuge Manager at Desoto NWR which also hosts disabled deer and turkey hunts. “Partners include: Wild Turkey Federation, Wheelin' Sportsmen, Women in the Outdoors, Pheasants Forever, Ducks Unlimited, Paralyzed Veterans of America, and Numerous Friends Groups.”



Above: Hunters from the Rice Lake disabled hunt pause for a group shot. USFWS Photo.

Other refuges and wetland management districts around the region have many disabled access areas to view and hunt wildlife at various times throughout the year. Rice Lake, Sherburne, Glacial Ridge, Horicon, DeSoto, Ottawa, Swan Lake NWRs and Fergus Falls, Detroit Lakes, Litchfield wetland management districts (WMDs) all have either played host for disabled hunts or feature disabled access areas, blinds and trails.

The disabled hunts are helping people enjoy personal fulfillment and satisfaction. John Benson Office Assistant at the Swan Lake NWR in Sumner, Mo. says that their popular disabled hunt is limited to 10 people in wheelchairs. People in wheelchairs are given priority because hunters with prosthetics can get around easier in the woods than those in wheel chairs. He estimates that the 15-year program has helped

between 150-300 hunters and their families. “The volunteers, what they like to do every year is to come out and help those who can't get around as well as the rest of us,” he said. Benson says the hunters enjoy it so much that he wouldn't mind it if they were to let 50 people go on the hunt, but they are limited by budget.

By and large the Midwest Region is doing its part to assure that all hunters are able to enjoy recreational activity on the Service lands. While some harvest deer, it is clearly the deer camp experience that most take away. It's a mutual exchange. It's both at once the opportunity to be given the chance and to give a chance, that takes center stage. It's the exhibition of humanity and compassion that resonates and rises above to make a statement. “Hunters are exuberant when they come to a refuge hunt. They do not care if they harvest an animal. Just to be out and hunting and feeling normal brings them such joy. Many of these hunters have not been able to be out and doing things they used to do. So these opportunities are very important to them,” says Sheets.

--*Valerie Rose Redmond*
External Affairs