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Ready for the fall hunting seasons?

The Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (DNR) reminds hunters to prepare for the opening of several hunting seasons in September. Hunters can once again head to Wisconsin's wild spaces as these seasons open across the state.

There are five dates throughout September when seasons open. Hunters are encouraged to double check they have the correct opening date for their season before going out for a hunt.

Sept. 1: Common gallinule, early Canada goose, early teal, mourning dove, rail, snipe.

Sept. 6: Bear.

Sept. 16: Cottontail rabbit (northern zone), crow, deer archery and crossbow, goose, ruffed grouse (Zone A), squirrels, turkey, youth waterfowl.

Sept. 23: Duck (northern zone), woodcock.

Sept. 30: Duck (southern zone).

The DNR also reminds hunters of the online resources available on its hunting webpage. In addition to hunting regulations, seasons dates, hunting hours and other resources, the public can find a list of public lands open to hunting using the Public Access Lands webpage.

As Wisconsin's most popular hunting seasons ramp up, it's important for all hunters to do their part to keep Wisconsin a safe place to hunt by following these firearm safety rules:

T - Treat every firearm as if it is loaded.

A - Always point the muzzle in a safe direction.

B - Be certain of your target, what's before it and what's beyond

it.

K - Keep your finger outside the trigger guard until you are ready to shoot.

Anyone born on or after Jan. 1, 1973, must have a hunter education

certification to purchase a hunting license, unless hunting under the Mentored Hunting Law. Learn about safe hunting in Wisconsin and register to take a hunter education course on the DNR website.



The latest DNR forecasts outline what hunters and trappers across the state can expect this year while pursuing their favorite game species.

WISCONSIN DNR

DNR announces four new partnerships

Goal is to promote hunting, trapping and shooting sports

The Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (DNR) announced the addition of four new partnerships to a growing list of organizations working alongside the DNR to recruit, retain and reactivate participants in hunting, trapping and shooting sports across Wisconsin.

The four new partnerships are with Pheasants Forever, National Deer Association, Raised At Full Draw and Pass it On-Outdoor Mentors.

Pheasants Forever's mission is to conserve pheasants, quail and other wildlife through habitat improvements, public access, education and conservation advocacy.

The National Deer Association strives to provide reliable, science-based information for hunters, empowering them to be more informed, successful and engaged stewards of deer and wildlife.

Raised at Full Draw is a nonprofit organization designed to promote archery, hunting and outdoor education through educational camps. The goal of these camps is to pass knowledge and techniques on to the next generation and allow them an opportunity to learn in a safe, hands-on environment.

Pass It On-Outdoor Mentors is a nationwide nonprofit organization that matches caring adults with

a passion for the outdoors with children that want to learn about the outdoors.

These new partnerships include new, jointly funded positions dedicated to providing and supporting programming and events around the state to promote hunting, trapping and shooting sports. These efforts will focus on teaching people how to get started in each of these activities, supporting and engaging people already involved and encouraging individuals with prior experience who may not be currently active in these activities to get involved again.

"Each of these organizations brings experience and specific areas

of interest that will provide diverse outdoor learning experiences for Wisconsinites of all experience levels," said Bob Nack, DNR recruitment, retention and reactivation team supervisor. "These partnerships help us develop an appreciation for the outdoors and support wildlife conservation efforts among the public while also promoting these activities to future generations."

Learn more about educational materials and opportunities to get involved with programs and events focused on helping people learn to hunt on the DNR website, dnr.wisconsin.gov.



Thousands of acres of public land, owned by local, county, state and federal governments, await hunters. Those willing to hunt off the beaten path will be rewarded. This doe was taken with a .45-70 Thompson-Center Contender pistol on Waupaca County public land by freelance writer Ross Bielema.

ROSS BIELEMA

Consider hunting on public land

By ROSS BIELEMA
Correspondent

If you aren't blessed with generous relatives who own a wooded farm or have your own 40-acre slice of paradise, finding a place to hunt is going to come before finding that trophy buck.

Fortunately you live in public hunting paradise, also known as Wisconsin. Slightly more than 7 million acres of land here is open to hunting in some form, including federal, state

and county land.

When I first moved to God's Country in 2000, having previously lived in Illinois and then Iowa, I was amazed at the amount of public land. I spent many years chasing deer and turkeys on public sites in Waupaca and Shawano counties, including Navarino State Wildlife Area, a 15,000-acre site teeming with deer, turkeys, waterfowl, small game and fish. I did take at least one deer from this mini-wilderness.

Although many hunters prefer

to hunt private land, public hunting can offer a few advantages. First off, you don't need to invest thousands or even hundreds of thousands of dollars to buy the land — you already helped pay for it. You won't need to spend more thousands on taxes (yes, you probably are already doing that, too). You can't plant food plots or leave your tree stands or blinds on public land all year, but if the hunting isn't that great or you just want a change of scenery, get out your plat book or cell phone and find a

new spot. Or scout multiple spots for many options when the wind direction changes or you tire of wading through swamp or stinging nettles.

One thing you'll quickly learn about public hunting is that the harder you work to get away from the crowds of lazy hunters, the more success you'll have. If you have trouble walking or just have no stamina, you can still find a welcome spot. But if you dig deep, get up earlier than everyone else and walk far off the main trails, you'll find that honey hole.

Famed hunters like Greg Miller and Myles Keller have done well on public land. Deer are highly adaptable and thrive close to humans, as those of us who have hit them with our cars and trucks know too well. Both have written many articles and even books on the topic. A quick internet search will show you a few of the many trophies they've taken on public ground. I interviewed Keller many years ago, and he talked about how wise bucks would find relatively undisturbed patches of ground near populated areas where nobody bothered to hunt. Such spots can be found on both public and private acreages.

Finding public spots close to home starts with talking to friends, neighbors and other fellow hunters.

When I grew frustrated 23 years ago that I couldn't get permission to hunt on private land, a co-worker told me about a public spot in Waupaca County that soon became my go-to hunting area. Nearby were two other state-owned spots. We became fast friends, and I occasionally hunt these areas to this day.

The Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources website is a goldmine for information on public hunting, fishing and other recreation on the state's wooded wonderland. Start your exploration here: <https://dnr.wisconsin.gov/topic/lands>.

State-owned lands are divided into parks, natural areas, wildlife areas, forests and fisheries.

Some parks have sections open to hunting, including Hartman Creek State Park near Waupaca. Most state parks have an entry fee. If you buy an annual Patron license, state parks admission is included.

Natural areas totaling around 406,000 acres may include private land, land trusts and county or local government lands as well as state-owned properties. Most natural areas are open to hunting (check regulations on each site).

State wildlife areas are open to a variety of recreation, including hunting, fishing and trapping. Here's a list of wildlife areas by county: <https://dnr.wisconsin.gov/topic/Lands/WildlifeAreas/alpha.html>.

Shawano County has Navarino listed as its only state wildlife area. Oconto County has both Green Bay West Shores and Peshtigo Brook state wildlife areas.

The state has county, state and national forests. Start here for a look at the first two: <https://dnr.wisconsin.gov/topic/forestry>.

Chequamegon-Nicolet National Forest is a vast 1.5 million acre haven for hunters, particularly those need-

ing large expanses for their pursuits. Bear, bobcat and previously wolf hunters in particular (wolf season currently is closed) can hunt this area, as do hound hunters. I successfully took a 35-pound bobcat with dogs in 2012 while hunting this beautiful national treasure. Start here to explore this northern Wisconsin adventureland: <https://www.fs.usda.gov/cnnf>.

This provides details on hunting regulations within the national forest: <https://www.fs.usda.gov/activity/cnnf/recreation/hunting>.

Fisheries areas are bordering creeks, rivers and lakes to afford erosion and development protection.

Check the rules of each area for recreation guidelines.

In addition to public lands, many private lands are accessible to hunting because of state agreements.

The best example of this is vast tracts of privately owned paper company lands granted tax breaks (under Managed Forest and Forest Crop laws) because they allow hunting, hiking and other activities.

Check out this secret treasure (not so secret to bear, bobcat and grouse hunters) here: <https://dnr.wisconsin.gov/topic/forestlandowners/opento-publicapp>.

This site provides access to maps of private land with public access. Note that in most cases, motorized vehicles are not allowed on these lands unless otherwise noted.

The state also has two programs to grant public access to private lands: the Voluntary Public Access (VPA) and the Turkey Hunter Access (THAP) programs. Take a look: <https://dnr.wisconsin.gov/topic/lands/private>.

You can search public lands via this link: <https://dnr.wisconsin.gov/topic/fl/RealEstate/PAL>.

You can also order the Public Access Lands Atlas of Wisconsin, a printed guide, here: www.uwbookstore.com/MerchList.aspx?ID=15893.

This 26-page online guide explains the atlas and also lists additional lands contacts and all DNR service centers: https://dnr.wi.gov/files/PDF/pubs/lf/LF0076_Front-Back.pdf.

If you prefer to hunt close to home or in just a few select areas, you can obtain printed county plat maps from each of the state's 72 county offices.

I hope you find this guide to public lands usage helpful.

Ross Bielema is a freelance writer from New London and owner of Wolf River Concealed Carry LLC. Contact him at Ross@wolfriverccw.com.

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Brush up on tree stand safety this fall

The Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources is reminding hunters to take proper precautions and follow all safety best practices before climbing into a tree stand this fall.

Surveys indicate one-quarter of Wisconsin bowhunters have experienced a fall or near-fall from an elevated stand in the past. Additionally, research has shown that risky tree stand climbing behavior becomes more likely to catch up to hunters the longer they hunt.

To avoid accidents and ensure a safe outing, always be mindful of the basic rules of tree stand safety before and during every hunt:

- Regardless of the type of tree stand used, always wear a full-body harness, also known as a fall-arrest system, that meets current industry standards.

- Connect the harness to the tether line and keep the tether line short. The tether is designed to keep the wearer in the seat and not catch them after falling.

- Always keep three points of contact while climbing into and out



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of the tree stand. This means always keeping two hands and one foot or two feet and one hand in contact with the stand or ground.

- Always use a haul line to raise and lower unloaded firearms or bow into and out of the stand. Hunt-

ers can also use the haul for other things like a heavy backpack.

- Use a lifeline when climbing up and down; this keeps wearers connected from when they leave the ground to when they get back down.

- Before heading out, tell some-

one where you'll be hunting and when you expect to return.

- Carry a cell phone to call for help if anyone becomes injured after a fall.

Beyond following these basic rules, hunters should always select a substantial and solid tree that can support their weight and is free from any dead limbs above them. Hunters should also inspect their equipment before each use, ensuring all lines are intact, their harness fits and that the harness is absent of snags and tears.

Additionally, hunters should thoroughly inspect their stand for missing components or broken features before climbing.

Hunters can also participate in the Tree Stand Manufacturers Association Safety Course. This free and interactive course takes just 15 minutes to complete yet contains valuable information that could save a life.

To learn more about tree stand safety rules and best practices, visit the DNR's webpage, dnr.wisconsin.gov.



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Volunteers sought for hunter education instructors

The Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (DNR) is seeking volunteers passionate about promoting safe, responsible and ethical hunting practices to serve as certified hunter education instructors.

Volunteer opportunities are available in all parts of the state.

Since the program's creation in 1967, more than 20,000 volunteer instructors have trained and certified more than one million hunters across Wisconsin. These efforts have directly contributed to a significant decrease in hunting-related incidents.

The continued dedication and exceptional quality of volunteer instructors have been the primary reasons for the program's success.

Becoming a volunteer instructor is a way to give back to local communities and have a part in shaping the next crop of Wisconsin hunters.

"As a volunteer instructor, I get to give back to a sport that I truly love by training students

to be safe for themselves, fellow hunters and their environment," said Rick Heisler, a volunteer instructor for more than 40 years and the hunter education program's 2022 Instructor of the Year. "Teaching these courses has become a vital part of my life."

There are two ways to become a certified volunteer hunter education instructor. Interested volunteers can either serve as an apprentice under a sponsoring instructor for at least two complete courses or attend a certification training session hosted by a DNR outdoor skills trainer.

Once certified, the DNR provides volunteer instructors with all the materials and equipment required to teach a hunter education course. Instructors must only teach one class every three years to remain certified, although many teach more.

For more information about becoming a volunteer instructor or applying, visit dnr.wisconsin.gov.



A woman aims her rifle as two people stand behind her. Becoming a volunteer instructor is a great way to give back to local communities and have a part in shaping the next crop of Wisconsin hunters.

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Help the DNR monitor state elk this fall

The Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (DNR) invites the public to help the DNR better monitor the movements of the state's elk herds throughout the fall breeding season by reporting sightings of elk outside of their normal ranges.

September marks the beginning of the breeding season for elk, with the season running through October. While most breeding activity occurs within their established territory, the Clam Lake and Black River Elk Ranges, younger bull elk have been known to wander great distances this time of year in search of unoccupied territory and lower competition for female elk.

It is not uncommon to see elk in Ashland, Bayfield, Price, Rusk and Sawyer counties in northern Wisconsin or in Jackson County in west-central Wisconsin.

Anyone who sees an elk outside of those ranges is encouraged to report their sighting online using the DNR's large mammal observation form. Reports with photos are helpful, if possible, but all reports are welcome. Additionally, elk may



September marks the beginning of the breeding season for elk, with the season running through October.

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sport unique identifiers such as ear tags or orange GPS tracking collars. If tag or collar numbers are easily visible, please include that information

in the report, as that information is helpful for DNR staff.

"Many elk are on the move this time of year," said Christina Kizews-

ki, DNR wildlife biologist. "Tracking the movements of these animals is an important, yet difficult part of our work. The reports we get from the public are a huge help towards these efforts."

Once widespread across North America, elk were eliminated from Wisconsin in the 1880s due to unregulated hunting. With the support of the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation, the Ho-Chunk Nation, the Ojibwe Tribes and several other partners, the DNR successfully reintroduced elk into the Northern Elk Range near Clam Lake in 1995 and the Central Elk Range near Black River Falls in 2015 and 2016, and subsequently supplemented the northern herd with elk from Kentucky in 2017 and 2019.

The Wisconsin elk population is estimated to reach 515 elk at the conclusion of the 2023 calving season, with 160 elk in the central herd and 355 in the northern herd.

More information on elk reintroduction and management is available on the DNR's Elk In Wisconsin webpage.

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Hunting and trapping forecasts highlight fall expectations

The Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (DNR) released the 2023 fall forecast series detailing the coming seasons' hunting outlook for a variety of popular game species.

These forecasts outline what hunters and trappers across the state can expect this year while pursuing their favorite game species. Forecasts also include reminders about public land access opportunities, game registration requirements and season dates.

"The DNR's species forecasts are the result of a thorough analysis of federal and local surveys, the findings of research projects, weather patterns and the on-the-ground information we receive from our advisory committees and staff," said Shawn Rossler, DNR wildlife biologist. "They are based on a good mix of hard science and the observations of DNR professionals and experienced outdoorspeople from across Wisconsin."

Hunters and trappers can explore fall forecasts for deer hunting, upland game birds, migratory bird hunting, bear and furbearer hunting and trapping.

For more resources and information about many of Wisconsin's most popular game species — including



The latest DNR forecasts outline what hunters and trappers across the state can expect this year while pursuing their favorite game species.

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current regulations, season dates, hunting hours as well as public and private hunting lands — check out the DNR's new hunting webpages at <https://dnr.wisconsin.gov/topic/Hunt>.

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Bowhunting basics in the 21st century

By **ROSS BIELEMA**
Correspondent

Ancient man used a bent stick, sinew string and crude arrow to take game for centuries. It wasn't a sport for them - it was pure survival.

Some of us bowhunters still prefer to keep it simple, using recurve bows or longbows with no mechanical advantage to hunt deer, turkeys and other wild game. But most of these traditional bows are laminated with fiberglass, and we shoot carbon or aluminum arrows (a few holdouts still shoot wooden shafts) tipped with machine-created broadheads that screw into the shafts.

Most bowhunters, however, have embraced technology in the form of compound bows. These pulley-equipped bows, once condemned in the early 1970s as the end of bowhunting, are now being used by the vast majority of bowhunters because they make it much easier to draw and hold the string for longer periods of time. This feature and precision sights, including adjustable front sights and a rear peep sight on the string, make the modern compound bow a very accurate weapon for quick, efficient kills.

As technology advances, so do compound bows. Even in the past 20 years, they become smaller (axle-to-axle lengths are now averaging 30 inches, while a few decades ago they were 40 inches), more efficient (shooting up to 340 feet per second and allowing let-off percentages of up to 90%) and most importantly for hunters, quiet. For comparison, recurve bows and longbows range from 54-70 inches long and they have no let-off. What you pull is what you hold. A compound bow that has a draw weight of 50 pounds would require holding just five pounds if it has 90% let-off.

If you are new to bowhunting or just want to learn to shoot a bow, don't panic. The gadgets and bewildering designs can be overwhelming, but every bow at the pro shops and in big-box store catalogs is basically the same design. You don't have to spend \$1,000 or more to get a good hunting bow, but you do need expert advice.

As a bowhunter for the past 49 years, my advice is to never buy a bow online. Any bow needs to be set up to fit you and tuned to shoot quietly and accurately. Head for your



Becky Angle of Oshkosh practices with her new Bear Royale compound bow, with help from her husband Shawn Angle, who also recently purchased his first compound bow. The lightweight and compact Royale can be adjusted from five to 50 pounds of draw weight to accommodate anyone from young children to adults, and has an adjustable draw length from 12-27 inches.

ROSS BIELEMA

archery pro shop and then listen.

Talk to other archers. Visit a 3-D shoot and watch the shooters. Most major bow brands with deep roots make quality products. The hometown favorite, Mathews, built in Sparta, is very popular, but can be pricey. Hoyt, Bow Tech and their Diamond line, Elite, Bear, PSE and many others will serve you well.

Don't be afraid to buy a used bow at a pro shop if that shop will give you a warranty. Today's bows will last a lifetime if they aren't dry-fired (never shoot a bow without an arrow) or otherwise abused.

Big box stores can be hit or miss, depending on the person who is working on your bow. I worked many years at the Gander Moun-

tain store in Appleton, and we had a few staffers who were experts on bow setup and tuning, but we also had a few who were learning. The mom-and-pop stores who specialize in bows are the ones you seek. Yoda would take his bow to places like Butch's Archery in Embarrass and Lena Swamp Archery in Oconto Falls. Buying bows on Amazon you must not.

Set a price range you can afford and keep things simple to start. Let the shop help determine your draw length (the length of your arrows from the anchor point on your face to the far side of the arrow rest, plus an inch for broadhead clearance) and draw weight (the amount of string resistance measured in pounds of

pull). Wisconsin law requires at least a 30-pound draw weight for hunting.

Shawn Angle of Oshkosh and his son, Alex, recently bought their first compound bows, hoping to try bowhunting in the near future. They each bought a Diamond Infinite 305 bow, made by Bow Tech.

Shawn's wife, Becky, then decided to get her first compound as well, choosing a lightweight Bear Royale that will accommodate a wide range of draw lengths and weights for youths and adults.

She has no intention of bowhunting but hopes to shoot targets and 3-D archery. She first shot a bow when she was 12 at a Boys and Girls Club, and now hopes to share the sport with her husband and stepson.

Those of us who first shot a re-curve bow in school or at a summer camp remember using bare fingers or perhaps a shooting glove. Most archers today use a release aid, which straps around the wrist and clamps onto a string loop that's added to the main bowstring. An adjustable trigger allows for a crisp, smooth release of the string, launching the arrow more consistently than fingers.

Many bows now use a drop-away arrow rest, which almost magically falls down the second an arrow is fired. The idea is to remove resistance and deflection of the arrow for a faster and more accurate shot.

But like anything mechanical, they can fail. These rests have been proven in the field, however.

The Angles opted for the tried-and-true Trophy Ridge Whisker Biscuits on their bows. A big advantage of this style of rest is that it holds the arrow in place when the bow is shot at any angle, which is common when bowhunting from a tree stand. An arrow slipping off a rest when shooting can have disastrous results. The Whisker Biscuit is also typically a fraction of the price of drop-aways.

Old-school arrows were wood, usually Port Orford cedar, and varied in straightness. Today's carbon



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and aluminum arrows are made by machines and extremely straight, with more expensive options built to tighter tolerances. Plan on spending \$50-\$100 for a half dozen arrows. Carbons are far more popular than aluminums because of carbon's strength and resistance to dents and bends, but carbons can crack and splinter. If you hit something hard

with a carbon, tap it against a tree or carefully twist it to see if it's splintered and then immediately throw it away.

You can spend hundreds of dollars on sights that are lighted with fiber optics or batteries, but a basic sight for \$40-\$80 will do just as well. Your pro shop can show you options and help you sight in.

The most important factor in bowhunting is a sharp broadhead. While classic fixed-blade broadheads are recommended for elk and other thick-skinned game, mechanical or expanding broadheads have become the most popular. Fixed-blade heads sometimes windplane or can be difficult to tune for straight flight, but most mechanicals fly like target heads because their blades are tucked inside a ferrule and only open on impact. When they work right, they also create huge wound channels for large blood trails (broadheads kill by hemorrhaging, not hydrostatic shock like a rifle bullet). But again, these "trick" heads sometimes don't deploy properly or otherwise fail. I've used both, but am back to fixed-blade heads.

Be sure you practice with whatever broadhead you choose before hunting.

Your pro shop and local archery club will be happy to help you get started on this adventure.

Bowhunting in the fall woods is like nothing else, no matter which equipment you choose. Good luck.

Ross Bielema is a freelance writer from New London and owner of Wolf River Concealed Carry LLC. Contact him at Ross@wolfriverccw.com.

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