

Youth & Bow Hunting



Friday, September 11, 2026

Learn safety with the use of airguns

Mentor hunting is ideal for pre-teen hunters

By ROSS BIELEMA
Correspondent

I grew up with guns, and from an early age, learned to handle BB and pellet guns before moving up to real firearms like .22 rifles and .410-gauge shotguns. There's an entry in my baby book that I shot a house sparrow at the tender age of 3 with my trusty Red Ryder BB gun (with assistance holding that now prized possession from my older brother, Brian).

My younger brother, Brent, also learned to shoot with airguns, and we thinned the starling population on the edge of Fulton, Illinois, our hometown, most nights at dusk with our beloved pellet guns.

One of my classmates, a brilliant kid with a straight-A average, was never allowed to have any pellet guns until he reached his 16th birthday. His parents didn't hunt or shoot, and it goes without saying that Jim was a maniac with his first gun, waiving the muzzle at us as we constantly scolded him. Brent and I learned safe gun handling from our father and Brian. Hunter education was just starting in Illinois in the early 1970s, and Brent and I were grandfathered in



Ian Pockat, of Kaukauna, steadies a Daisy BB gun for his son, Rowan Pockat, 7, during a youth BB gun contest at the fall 2025 Fox Valley Muzzle Loaders Club Capote Classic Rendezvous in rural New London. Both father and son are wearing eye protection. Airguns are ideal for training youngsters to shoot and hunt safely, especially when they are too small to carry a firearm. This year's FVML BB gun contest for youths 15 and younger will be held Oct. 4, and everyone is welcome. There is no entry fee and plenty of prizes.

ROSS BIELEMA

for hunting licenses.

You don't learn gun safety from osmosis or some instinct that suddenly tingles and kicks in on your 12th or 16th birthday. It's best learned hands-on from experienced hunters, whether family or

strangers.

That's why I've taught hunter safety for decades, including 13 years in Iowa and 20 in Wisconsin.

Kids lucky enough to be raised in hunting families get the itch to join the fun very early. Some kids have

to seek out an uncle, cousin, neighbor or other experienced hunter on their own for both training and a place to hunt. And airguns are excellent training tools that can help them learn safe gun handling and shooting skills.

As most of us fans of "A Christmas Story" know, a BB gun can "shoot your eye out" (I had a junior high history teacher who had a glass eye because of a BB gun mishap), but the relatively low power of said airgun offers a margin

of safety when a youngster has a misstep. A high-powered rifle that launches a bullet 3 to 5 miles or a shotgun that creates a 73-caliber hole in plywood is far less forgiving.

I should note that some of today's airguns are not your father's or grandfather's Daisys and Crosmans.

PCP (pre-charged pneumatics) in bores as large as .50 caliber can take down big game, including deer, bears and Cape buffalo. Break-barrel pellet guns up to .30 caliber can produce enough energy to take down small and medium-sized game up to coyotes. Air guns are now legal for deer in Wisconsin (if you hunt with one for deer, contact me because I'd love to do a story).

The National Rifle Association, the world's oldest firearms safety organization, offers six tips on teaching new shooters with airguns.

One big advantage in using a BB or pellet gun for youth training is the lack of recoil and noise common with hunting firearms. No ear protection is needed for airguns (eye protection is a must). Kids can develop flinching from the start with a firearm, so it's easier to teach shooting fundamentals (trigger squeeze, breathing control, shooting positions) without the shoulder-rocking explosions.

Learning to shoot with iron sights is always a good idea, especially because most young eyes are sharp and clear. But

AIRGUNS, continued on page 3



Several hunting seasons are opening in September all over Wisconsin.
WISCONSIN DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES

Get ready for fall hunting seasons

The Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources reminds hunters to prepare for the opening of several hunting seasons in September. New this fall, the DNR published an online version of the hunting regulations, including a drop-down filter that can help people navigate to the info they need faster. It can be viewed at <https://dnr.wisconsin.gov/topic/Hunt/regulations/OnlineHuntingRegulations>.

There are six dates throughout September when seasons open. Hunters are encouraged to double-check season dates and that they have acquired all necessary licenses and stamps before going out for a hunt.

Opening on Sept. 1 were seasons for the common gallinule, early Canada goose, early teal, mourning dove, rail and snipe.

Opening on Sept. 9 was bear season in Zones A, B, C, D, E and F with aid of bait and all other legal methods not using dogs.

Opening on Sept. 12 will be seasons for cottontail rabbit (Northern Zone), deer (archery and crossbow), ruffed grouse (Zone A), squirrels (gray and fox) and turkey.

Coming up Sept. 16 is opening day for regular goose (Northern and Southern zones) and bear (Zones A, B, D with the aid of dogs, the aid of bait and all other legal methods).

Youth waterfowl and woodcock seasons open Sept. 19, and duck season (Northern Zone) opens Sept. 26.

The DNR also reminds hunters of mobile-friendly online resources, including hunting regulations, season dates, hunting hours and more, available

on the DNR's Hunting webpage. Hunters can find information on species population levels and hunting opportunities on the DNR's fall hunting forecasts.

A list of public lands open to hunting is available using the Public Access Lands webpage.

The Fields and Forest Lands Interactive Game Bird Hunting Tool provides hunters information on managed dove fields, stocked pheasant properties, as well as habitat for hunting ruffed grouse and woodcock.

This information and more can be found at <https://dnr.wisconsin.gov>.

As a reminder, 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.

AIRGUNS, continued from page 2

a low-cost scope can be mounted on many air rifles, getting kids ready for the same sighting advantage on their first deer rifles.

Look here for more tips: <https://www.nrafamily.org/content/6-hot-tips-for-teaching-new-shooters-with-air-guns/>.

Hunter safety instructor Bob Bohardt, of Shawano, says some parents want to start their kids in a class too soon. While the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources does not have a minimum age to take an in-person or online hunter education class, the reading level of materials is designed for someone 12 or older, he noted.

“How much time do you spend on one kid?” he said, explaining that kids age 8-10 may struggle to even hold a firearm and may be enrolled just because a parent wants them to take it. “How do you stop this?”

Bohardt, 74, will mark his 40th year as a DNR

certified instructor next year. He helped start in-person hunter ed classes in Shawano, Gresham, Bonduel, Bowler and Tigerton, but these days, he helps lead the one-day internet field classes (a hands-on class after students take an online course) with the help of his granddaughter, Stephanie Popelka, also of Shawano. Bohardt is also a longtime delegate for the Wisconsin Conservation Congress for Shawano County.

When he visited his grandma’s place as a boy, he sometimes shot pellet guns but for the most part learned firearms safety with a bolt-action .410 shotgun.

The state’s mentor hunting program is ideal for young hunters not ready to take a class. The law says any mentee must be within arm’s length of the mentor. Bohardt liked the old version of the law that required the mentor and child to share a firearm, but now each can

have their own gun. There is no maximum age to be a mentee, other than those born before Jan. 1, 1973. You must be at least 18 and a hunter ed graduate to be a mentor.

Here are more details on mentor hunting: <https://dnr.wisconsin.gov/Education/OutdoorSkills/mentor>.

Another great way for youngsters to learn firearms safety is to shoot trap. Bohardt is involved in that, too, helping start a Youth Trap League at Shawano Gun Club that involves students in grades 6-12 from Shawano, Wolf River Lutheran, Bonduel, Marion and Tigerton schools. The league sees about 80 kids in spring and up to 60 in fall, all learning the responsible way to enjoy a shooting sport that will get them ready for the woods.

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



Bob Bohardt, a 39-year veteran of the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources hunter education instructors program, won this Friends of the Fair award in 2023. He continues to offer his shooting and hunting expertise in Shawano County as a delegate of the state Conservation Congress and as a coach and organizer for the Youth Trap League at Shawano Gun Club.

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Special seasons for youths offer chance to hunt

Special youth hunting weekends for wild turkey, white-tailed deer and waterfowl allow youngsters to hunt and gain experience without competing against adults. These youth hunting events are scheduled one weekend before the regular hunting season and are open to residents and non-residents 15 and younger.

All youth hunters must have successfully completed a hunter education program or participated in the mentored hunt program.

Hunters must hold the required valid licenses, stamps and permits for the species they intend to pursue. An adult 18 or older must accompany the youth hunter.

An adult cannot attend more than two youth hunters at one time. Only one youth hunter can follow the mentor hunting program if the adult is

attending to more than one youth hunter.

Youth hunters may hunt deer with a gun in all deer management units except state park and non-quota units. A gun deer hunting license is required if hunting with a firearm.

The bag limit is one buck per gun deer harvest authorization, plus additional antlerless deer per antlerless deer harvest authorization valid for the deer management unit that the youth hunter will be hunting.

Youth hunters with an archer or crossbow license may continue to hunt with a bow or crossbow during the archery and crossbow season, which runs concurrently with the youth gun deer hunt. All other hunting regulations apply.

This year’s youth deer hunt will be Oct. 10-11.

Youth hunters ages 15 and younger may hunt deer with a gun, bow or

crossbow in all deer management units, except Menominee County or in state parks.

Because the archery and crossbow seasons run concurrently with the youth gun deer hunt, youth hunters who possess an archer or crossbow license may also continue to hunt deer with a bow or crossbow.

Both resident and non-resident youth hunters are eligible to participate.

Again, youths must be accompanied by an adult 18 or older. The adult does not have to be a licensed hunter or a hunter education graduate to accompany one or two youths who are at least 12 and have completed a hunter education course.

Adults accompanying youth hunters may not hunt deer with a firearm during the youth hunt, but may possess a bow, crossbow or gun to hunt for a

game species that is open at that time, including deer with a bow or crossbow only.

An adult may not accompany more than two

youth hunters during the youth gun deer hunt at any given time.

For all youth hunters 11 and younger, or youth hunters 12-15 who do not

possess a hunter education certificate, and who possess a gun deer hunting license:

SEASONS, continued on page 4

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Watch for power lines when preparing for hunt

By **BLAKE AND KATIE JAGIELLO**
Special to NEW Media

I could barely sleep last night. I kept thinking about the big buck Dad saw on the trail cam last week. My alarm went off way too early, but I didn't even care – I was already wide awake. I threw on my warmest gear, grabbed my backpack and tiptoed out the door like a ninja so I wouldn't wake my little sister.

It was a cool, crisp morning. My boots crunched with every step as we walked to the stand, and my breath made little clouds in the cold air. Dad gave me a thumbs-up before he walked to his stand nearby, and Grandpa and I climbed in his.

Now I'm sitting here, watching the woods wake up.

The sunrise is turning the sky orange and pink, and it's so quiet I can hear my own heartbeat. Then – crunch. I freeze. Something's moving. My hands grip the rifle tighter. Could it be him? The big one?

I hold my breath and wait. I nudged Grandpa to show him that the buck was coming. "Can I shoot?" Before Grandpa could even answer, I had my barrel out the deer blind window and waited for the perfect shot. Boom!

"Grandpa, I got him."

Now came the hard part, waiting. After 30 minutes, Grandpa said that we could finally walk over to the deer.

There it was, a nice 7 pointer.

As hunting season approaches, excitement builds for time outdoors. I'd like to share these safety tips with you before you head into the woods. My mom works at OEC and has shared them with me.

Power lines and utility



Blake Jagiello shows of the 7-point buck he shot while hunting with this dad and grandfather.

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equipment are often out of sight – and out of mind – especially in wooded or rural areas.

Ignoring them can lead to serious injuries or even death.

Keep these tips in mind to stay safe and avoid costly or dangerous incidents:

- Scout the area. Before hunting, take time to scout your area during daylight. Look for power lines, poles and electrical equipment. Note their locations to avoid them later.

- Power safely. If you're using a portable electrical generator on your hunting trip, don't use it

inside a cabin or RV, or in a confined area. Make sure it's used outside where there is plenty of ventilation.

- Avoid aiming toward power lines or equipment. Never fire near or toward poles, lines, substations or transformers. A stray bullet could knock down a line, interrupt power or create a deadly hazard.

- Keep your distance. Always stay at least 10 feet away from overhead lines, poles and other electrical infrastructure when setting up or taking down tree stands.

- Never climb a utility pole. Even if it looks like the perfect vantage point, don't do it. Poles carry high-voltage lines, and climbing them can be deadly.

- Don't use utility poles for support. Tree stands or blinds should never be attached to or supported by power poles or electrical equipment.

Know the danger of downed lines. If you come across a downed power line or damaged electrical equipment, stay at least 50 feet away, even if it doesn't appear to be live.

Power lines can still carry

electricity when on the ground, posing a risk of shock or electrocution.

Call 911 or your utility right away to help prevent a dangerous situation.

Whether you're a seasoned hunter or heading out for the first time, staying aware of your surroundings could save your life.

Blake Jagiello is the son of Katie Jagiello, Oconto Electric Cooperative's communications and marketing specialist. This article first appeared in the OEC November 2025 newsletter.



Special youth hunting weekends for wild turkey, white-tailed deer and waterfowl allow youngsters to hunt and gain experience without competing against adults. Youths must be accompanied by an adult 18 or older. The adult does not have to be a licensed hunter or a hunter education graduate to accompany one or two youths who are at least 12 and have completed a hunter education course.

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SEASONS, continued from page 3

- Hunters must be "mentored" by an adult who is within arm's reach at all times during the hunt.

- Qualified adult mentors must be at least 18 and have the youth's parents' or guardians' permission to mentor the youth hunter.

- Mentors must possess a valid Wisconsin hunting license for the current hunting season. The type

of hunting license does not matter unless the mentor will be hunting other game. When hunting on land the mentor owns or occupies, a mentor is exempt from the hunting license requirement if not hunting, or if only hunting rabbits, squirrel, raccoon, fox, coyote, beaver or unprotected species.

- Qualified adult mentors may only mentor one

youth hunter whose age is 11 and under, or who has not completed hunter education, at any given time.

- Adults accompanying youth hunters may not hunt deer with a firearm during the youth hunt, but may possess a bow, crossbow or gun to hunt for a game species that is open for them to hunt at that time, including deer with a bow or crossbow only.

Early goose season opened Sept. 1

Regular goose seasons open in different zones in September and October

There are still a few days left in the early goose season.

The season opened Sept. 1 and runs through Sept. 15.

The early goose season has an increased daily bag limit of five Canada geese and is uniformly regulated across Wisconsin.

The regular goose season will open in the Northern and Southern Goose Zones on Sept. 16. The Mississippi River Goose

Zone will open Oct. 3.

The 2026 population estimate for Wisconsin-breeding Canada geese is slightly lower than the 5-year population estimate.

While afield, goose hunters must carry either an electronic or physical copy of their small game license, early Canada goose permit, Harvest Information Program (HIP) registration, as well as proof of purchase of a state waterfowl stamp and federal

Duck Stamp at all times.

Acceptable methods of proof include a paper copy, a DNR-approved PDF displayed on a mobile device or a Go Wild Conservation Card, along with a Wisconsin driver's license.

More information on goose hunting in Wisconsin, including how to find places to hunt and regulations, can be found at <https://dnr.wisconsin.gov/topic/hunt/waterfowl>.



The 2026 early goose season opened statewide Sept. 1 and runs through Sept. 15.

BOB HAASE

Young hunters need serious tools for the woods

By **ROSS BIELEMA**
Correspondent

The saddest thing I can imagine is a kid without a pocketknife.

Next in line on my Sad List would be a young hunter in the woods without a decent hunting knife (or two or three).

Growing up in the non-PC world of the 1960s and 1970s, I carried a pocketknife everywhere, including school. What self-respecting Cub Scout or Webelo would be caught without his multiblade Scout knife?

Sacrilege. Nobody cared, least of all teachers. Kids, don't try this now.

Once you are in the timber, it's time to check and re-check that glorious blade your parent, grandpa, uncle or other hunting companion bought you. Whether you opted for a solid single-blade locking folder or a stealthy, gleaming sheath knife (leather sheath, please), it doesn't matter. You will eventually own and carry both.

I love guns, but I have a passion for knives. Once you start carrying one, you'll wonder why you ever lived without them. Did you ever try slicing bread with a table knife? Cut a piece of twine with a dull scissors? Not too sharp, eh? Well, let's get with the program and evolve to the tool-using stage.

Parents will have to judge the maturity of their kids, as always, but in general, when you give kids a little responsibility, they seem to appreciate your confidence in them and take their newfound freedom seriously. Kids with toy guns learn what real guns can do at the shooting range, and the same holds true of knives.

A sharp knife can slice a finger but can also field dress and skin a rabbit, squirrel or deer. Start a kid with a small blade and when they grow in maturity, they can graduate to a hunting blade.

It's been said that a sharp knife is safer than a dull one, because it cuts what needs to be cut without slipping, but I am terrible at sharpening knives. Today we have replaceable-blade knives made by Havalon called the Piranta line, which offer scalpel-sharp blades you toss instead of sharpening. Genius.

These are an option for older kids, but not a great idea for the grade-schoolers because an early mistake could become a long-lasting one. The Havalon blog is packed with great hunting and knife information for all ages at <https://blog.havalon.com>.

I prefer an American-made blade, but most trusted brands like Gerber, Buck, Kershaw and SOG offer both U.S.-made and foreign options to hit certain price points. One of my new favorites is Bear and Son, with most of its reasonably-priced blades made in Alabama. On a recent trip to Myrtle Beach, we made the mandatory stop in Sevierville, Tennessee for a 90-minute waltz through three stories of blades at world's largest knife store, AKA Smokey Mountain Knife Works.

Many were Bear and Son blades. You can get a lot of knife from them for \$30-\$80.

Carbon-steel blades are easier to sharpen than stainless steel, but most hunters opt for the latter because they are rust-resistant (if you leave them in a leather sheath

too long, they will start to rust).

Keep your knives clean (blood will etch steel) and lightly oiled.

Plan to spend at least \$30 on a solid sheath knife and at least \$40 on a folder. The latter are easier to carry in a pack or pocket, but when it comes time to clean your knife, it's much harder to get the viscera out of the folding knife's nooks and crannies. That's why you need both.

Local sporting goods stores like Dunham's, Fleet Farm, Scheels and Cabela's/Bass Pro Shops are full of decent hunting knife choices. You can also go the online route (adults have to order knives) for a larger selection. Boker, Cold Steel, Morakniv and Helle (the last two mostly Finnish Puukko designs) are other favorites of mine. Some of these border on works of art, but for hunting, rugged utility is its own beauty.

Choose a blade shape that best fits the job. I prefer a strong tanto point for general carry, a 3- to 5-inch blade is handy for most cutting tasks.

This guide to a child's first knife from knifemaker A.G. Russell offers great advice at <https://agrussell.com/knife-articles/buying-your-childs-first-knife>.

Now that we have a blade or two for field-dressing, skinning and general cutting, let's look at a few other must-haves for young hunters:

- A comfy seat. Youth hunters get wiggly and cold. Comfort is key to their success (just like us grown-ups). A plastic bucket won't cut it. A nice folding stool with a backrest is good but a heavy-duty hunting seat with a silent swivel is even better.
- A soft pad. A



Young hunters need quality gear to perform well and stay comfortable in the fall woods. Good U.S.-made knives include, from left, a Bear and Son sheath knife, Helle puukko knife and a folding Cabela's-branded Gerber liner-lock. Other tested gear includes a Dunham's folding stool, ThermoSeat cushion, compact metal LED flashlight, headlamp, folding saw and pelvic bone saw.

ROSS BIELEMA

ThermoSeat or other cushion (even a boat cushion or old throw pillow) offers OK sitting on the ground or a bucket and adds an extra layer of cush for the tush on any chair.

A great flashlight. Most lights today are super-bright LED bulbs. Rechargeable ones are OK but seem to go dead when you need them most. A headlamp is even better

if you are carrying lots of gear (waterfowl or deer hunters, or me).

A small folding or pelvic bone saw. The folding saw is great for trimming bigger limbs for shooting lanes. An alternative to the pelvic bone saw is a small hatchet, but this adds more weight to your backpack.

A pruning shears. The greatest hunting tool next

to the knife, a decent pruning shears will cut through grass and small limbs silently, and also works great for cutting joints when cleaning squirrels or rabbits, as well as turkey legs.

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Take advantage of Navarino Wildlife Area for fall hunting

Navarino Wildlife Area is part of the Lower Wolf River Bottomlands Natural Resources Area and can be found in southern Shawano and northeast Waupaca counties. The property includes more than 15,000 acres of state-owned land and the largest parcel within the Lower Wolf River Bottomlands Natural Resources Area.

The wildlife area is comprised of sandy uplands and ridges with marshy depressions. Habitat types include open fields, swamp conifer, lowland scrub, bog, bottomland hardwoods, pine plantations, and an aspen and oak forest. The West Branch of the Shioc River and the Wolf River run through the property.

Navarino Wildlife Area is seven miles south of Shawano. Ample parking opportunities are located throughout the property on the following roads: McDonald, South Townline, Lessor-Navarino, Birch and state Highway 156, County Road K,

Two Creek, Wildlife and Swamp Road.

There are two improved boat launches on the property (River Road and Highway 156), three designated carry-in sites (Zeuske Road, Steucks Road and Highway 156) and several other undeveloped access points to the Wolf River, Shioc River, tributaries and flowages.

The nature center maintains hiking, snowshoe and groomed ski trails along with picnic areas, restrooms, a parking lot, a shelter and a cabin to accommodate program participants.

Navarino Wildlife Area is managed to provide opportunities for public hunting, trapping, fishing and other outdoor recreation while protecting the qualities of the unique native communities and associated species found on the property.

The large acreage contains significant occurrences of several natural communities, including floodplain forest, sedge



Navarino Nature Center's wildlife area is comprised of sandy uplands and ridges with marshy depressions. Habitat types include open fields, swamp conifer, lowland scrub, bog, bottomland hardwoods, pine plantations, and an aspen and oak forest, all suitable for hunting enthusiasts.

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meadow, emergent marsh and dry-mesic forest.

Management includes the maintenance of continuous, extensive floodplain communities and a hydrologic connection between the river and off-channel aquatic habitats. Flowage management, with periodic drawdowns, is used

to maintain and improve the emergent marsh and open-water wetland types.

Bottomland hardwoods are maintained by favoring silver maple and swamp white oak while retaining other native trees and understory species. The aspen cover type is maintained through coppice

cutting at rotation age to regenerate the type. Quality red oak sites are managed through shelterwood harvests that are timed to coincide with good acorn crops.

Grassland and shrub-carr wetlands are maintained and improved through mowing and

prescribed fire. Sedge meadow is maintained or restored where feasible.

Farming agreements are used to maintain a mosaic of agricultural land. Populations of invasive species are controlled or eliminated by cutting, pulling, burning, herbicide treatment and biocontrol.

Peshtigo Brook Wildlife Area offers rustic hunting, trapping opportunities

Peshtigo Brook Wildlife Area is a 2,373-acre property in Oconto County, with about two-thirds of the property making up the Peshtigo Brook Meadow and Woods State Natural Area.

This area has extensive, unique native sedge meadows interspersed with dry oak, pine and aspen forests. It provides excellent remote hunting, trapping and wildlife-viewing recreation.

The property is north of Suring and south of state Highway 64. Take Hawthorn Road from Pipeline Road to a parking area on the property's southwest corner. A single parking lot is provided. Remote country recreation skills are a must for the limited development of this property.

State ownership of the property began in 1953, with the original management directed toward waterfowls and sharp-tailed grouses. With changes in hydrology and the succession of land cover, management has shifted to an emphasis on wildlife and the unique sedge meadow community.

Timber sales in the area



The Peshtigo Brook Wildlife Area offers many recreational opportunities — birding, cross-country skiing (no designated trail), hiking (no designated trail), hunting, trapping, wild edibles and gathering and wildlife viewing.

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improve habitat for wildlife dependent on early successional forest types. Prescribed burns to control brush in the sedge meadows are conducted periodically. Oak wilt containment measures have been utilized here. Timber stand improvement plans, and treatments for invasive species treatments are planned for the future.

The road system is maintained for management activities but is not currently open to vehicular traffic. Plans include improving access and parking through agreements with the town and county.

This property is managed in collaboration with the Bureau of Natural Heritage Conservation.

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