

GOOSE ISLAND MANAGED DEER HUNT



BOB LAMB / LA CROSSE TRIBUNE

Dustin Crocker travels in a specially designed lift chair that is mounted on a Kubota all-terrain-vehicle that the North American Squirrel Association bought several months ago. Crocker, a teenager with cerebral palsy, shot his first deer over the weekend during the managed deer hunt at Goose Island County Park.

Managed deer hunt deemed a three-dimensional success

Win Win Win

for the physically
challenged hunters



BOB LAMB

Tribune Outdoors Editor

It's amazing what can be accomplished when hunters, volunteers, governmental agencies and conservation organizations work together.

Last weekend's managed deer hunt for physically challenged hunters on Goose Island County Park is a classic example.

Christmas not only came early for many physically challenged deer hunters, but the park's much-needed deer population was trimmed. Whether this is the first and last managed deer hunt on the island, is another story for another day. What is most important is this was a "win-

for the health
of the herd

win-win" situation for the hunters, the overall health of the herd and the park environment.

The two-day hunt provided "hunts of a lifetime" for hunters with varying degrees of disabilities.

Brandon Finck, of Onalaska, Wis., and Dustin Crocker of Sparta, Wis., a pair of teenagers with cerebral palsy, each shot their first deer. Peter Panagis Jr., of Franklin, Wis., and Thomas Zompolas of Mequon, Wis., a pair of 85-year-old deer hunters, got a chance to hunt one more time in the twilight of their life.

Trust me. You had to be there to appreciate how much this hunt meant to them.

Panagis had heart valve replacement a few months ago. He also suffers from bad knees and hips. He can only see out of one eye, yet he shot two deer in a matter of seconds on Saturday.

"Peter was really shaking after he shot the deer," said Larry Lawryn, a member of the Badger State Sportsman's Club and Panagis' mentor for the day.

for the
park environment

"I turned toward him and asked him if I was having a heart attack," said Panagis, who was reliving the moment over and over again. "This is the most memorable hunting experience I've ever had in my life."

You can bet that Finck and Crocker will remember the hunt, too.

Crocker shot his first deer, a doe, on Saturday and was beaming with pride. So was his father and mentor, Jerry.

"This program was set up really nice," said Dustin's father.

"And yes, we do like venison, too," Dustin said.

Finck appeared a little disappointed after Saturday's 3½-hour morning hunt. He didn't even see a deer. However, his patience was rewarded on Sunday when he shot two antlerless deer.

All 28 hunters saw deer and had shooting opportunities, according to Ron Lichtie, Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources area wildlife



Panagis Jr.



Zompolas



Finck

See LAMB, D-2

LAMB

From D-1

manager.

"There were numerous happy, happy people," he said. "All of them took the deer they harvested, or if they shot two, they gave one to those who didn't get a deer."

For the record, 37 deer were killed, including 29 antlerless deer. Nine of the deer killed were fawns. Four of the eight bucks killed had already shed their antlers.

Tim Babros, DNR wildlife supervisor from Black River Falls, Wis., said the hunt was a huge success and hunters were very excited.

"One hunter shook my hands three different times, he was so appreciative," said Babros, who helped age deer.

Ageing deer was just one test. Biologists and volunteers also weighed each deer before and after it was field-dressed. A

retired USDA meat inspector of more than 30 years volunteered to check hearts, lungs and livers. Heads were also removed for chronic wasting disease testing.

Immediate results showed the adult deer averaged 40 pounds less than they should have been for their age, a definite sign that the health of the park's burgeoning herd is not good.

"The fawns are doing fine because they are getting mama's milk," Lichtie said. "But as soon as they feed for themselves, they run into trouble. We had 3-year-olds that were smaller than fawns."

One doe, aged at 12-plus years old, was in extremely poor condition and probably wouldn't have made it through even the mildest winter on the island. The doe, which looked the size of a fawn, weighed only 100 pounds, including 63 pounds field-dressed. It had very few teeth left.

Lichtie said 50 percent of the deer also had liver flukes, including two with cysts on their livers. Lichtie said biologists usually find liver flukes in only 1 percent of the deer tested in southern Wisconsin.

While feeding deer in the park was banned a few years ago, a few park visitors still sneak bread and pastries to the animals. However, Lichtie said they are doing more harm than good for the overall health of the animals.

"Artificial feeding of things like bread fills their stomachs, but has no nutritional value for the deer," he said.

Meanwhile, hats off to the Badger State Sportsman's Club, which supplied the majority of the mentors and volunteers. The club also provided free lunch to everyone both days.

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