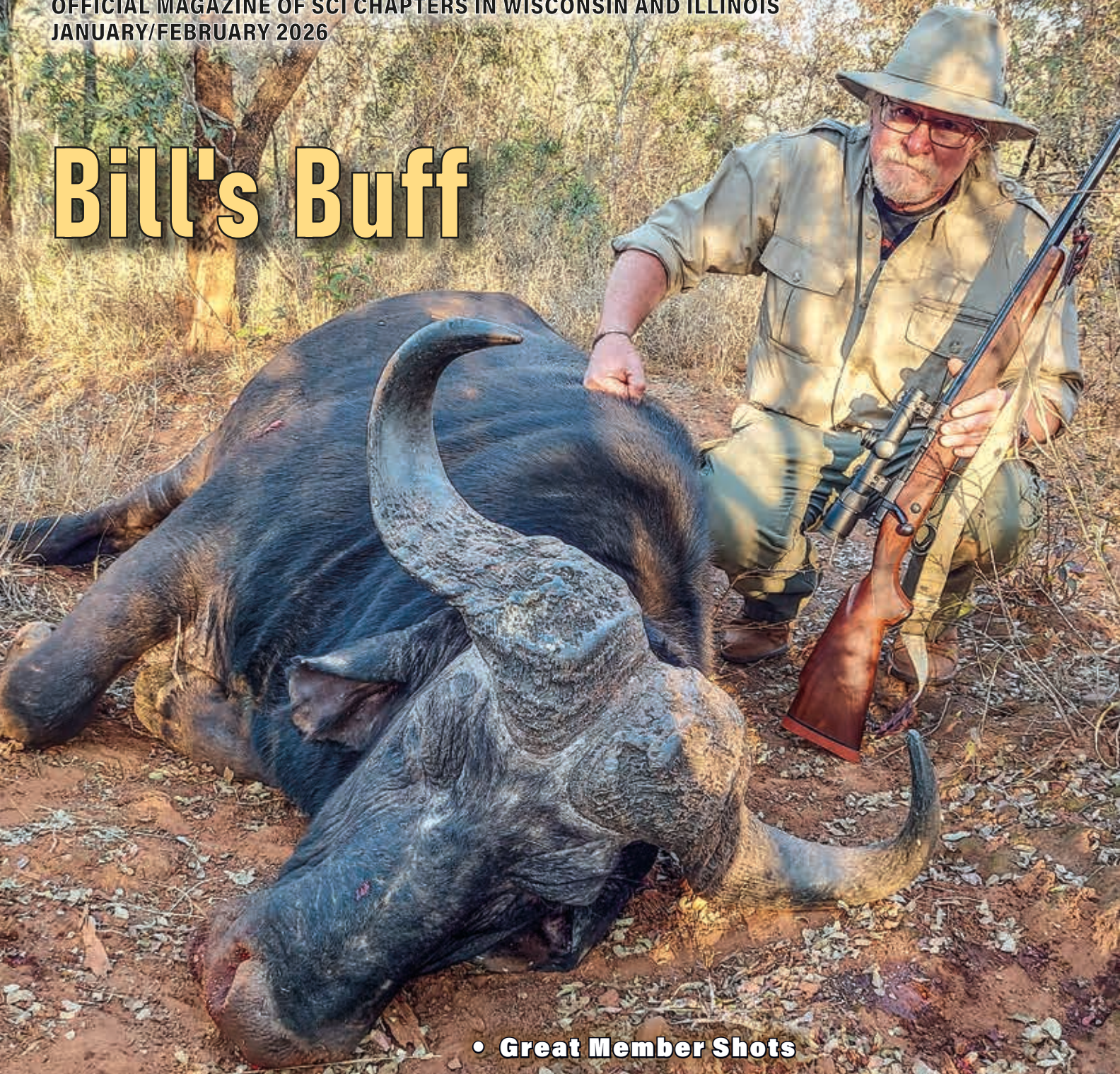


HUNTERS

OFFICIAL MAGAZINE OF SCI CHAPTERS IN WISCONSIN AND ILLINOIS
JANUARY/FEBRUARY 2026

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HUNTERS is a bimonthly publication for members of SCI chapters in Illinois and Wisconsin, plus bonus electronic circulation, which includes some of the world's most avid and affluent conservationists who enjoy hunting here and around the world. They have earned a reputation of leadership on natural resources issues and giving to protect and support the future of hunting and conservation here and abroad. To share your message with them, send ads and editorial submissions to Mark LaBarbera at mlabarbera57@icloud.com.

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HUNTERS

Official Magazine of SCI Chapters in Wisconsin and Illinois
January/February 2026

On the cover: Member Bill Hilgers and his wife Vicki share their South African adventure starting on pg 14.

- 4 **SCI Region 16 Report**
by Regional Rep. Charmaine Wargolet
- 4 **Lake Superior Chapter Report**
by Scott Olson, President
- 5 **Northeast WI Chapter Report**
by President Kathryn Thede
- 5 **Conservation: Archery Trade Gives \$47M**
- 6 **Wisconsin Chapter Report**
by President Dean LePoidevin
- 7 **Southeast WI Bowhunters Chapter Report**
by President Dan Trawicki
- 7 **Santa Visits Illinois & Chicago Chapter**
- 7 **Wisconsin PR Funding**
- 8 **Badgerland Chapter Report**
by President Randy Mayes
- 8 **Legislative Report**
by Lobbyist Dan Trawicki
- 14 **Hunt Report: South Africa Hilgers' Successful 6th Safari**
by Bill Hilgers
- 18 **You Can Hunt Cans at Delta Marsh's Bull Can**
by Mark LaBarbera
- 24 **Humanitarian Services: Big Al Charity Pheasant Hunt Makes Dreams Come True**
by Rick Rollo
- 26 **Hunt Report: Alaska DIY Moose**
by Tim Larson
- 29 **Conservation: George Meyer Tribute**
- 32 **Bob's the Best**
by Mark LaBarbera
- 36 **Youth: Deer Season Data**
- 38 **Social Media & Hunting**
by Megan Richard



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New members and your families are always welcome at SCI. Visit these websites and join a chapter to start your adventure. Members enjoy great fun, meet new friends, make a difference in their community and help the future of hunting, plus you will discover new deals and opportunities that improve your hunting skill and enjoyment. We invite you to join online today.

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SCI Region 16 Representative

Charmaine Wargolet

charmainew@ameritech.net

SCI Region 16 Report

by *Charmaine Wargolet, Regional Representative*

Happy New Year everyone! A new year to fill with wonderful adventures along with wonderful memories. Hope you make the most of all life has to offer!

I have been so excited to see and hear a number of youth hunters who took deer this past season. Some of them are featured in this issue. Parents are doing a great job of mentoring and encouraging these young people to enjoy our hunting heritage. Kudos!

The only thing to report this month is our upcoming Region 16 annual meeting. All five of my chapters, the Badgerland, Illinois-Chicago, NE Wisconsin, SE WI Bowhunters, and Wisconsin chapters are all sending between one and five members of their boards to the meeting. It will be January 17th at Weldall Mfg. and I look forward to our usual lively discussion and getting questions answered by SCI National Chapter Services Rep. Jordan Wisecup. Also in attendance will be



our Hunters Magazine Editor Mark LaBarbera and state lobbyist Dan Trawicki. We are so fortunate to have these talented individuals willing to do this important work for us. I will have a report on this meeting in the next issue.

The only other thing I want to remind you about is, with all of the banquets and fundraisers coming up, please consider a donation of time, talent or treasure, or all of the above! It is a great time to spend with like-minded spirits, and the profits are used for many worthwhile programs and projects in our state.

As usual, shoot straight, be well, and God bless!

Lake Superior Chapter Report

by *Scott Olson, President*

The Lake Superior Chapter of SCI will host its 26th Banquet at the Grand Casino in Hinckley, MN on March 27-28, 2026. We are proud to announce that Melissa Bachman will be

our guest speaker this year. The Lake Superior Chapter invites everyone to join us for two fun-filled days celebrating sustainable use conservation and protecting hunting rights worldwide. Two fun filled days with much to do, great food, and awesome entertainment. Sporting Clays shoot Friday morning, dinner and live auction Friday evening. Saturday will have seminars, Sables Wine Tasting event, dinner and live auction. As always, lots of raffles, games and firearms to give away. Please join us!



Northeast Wisconsin Chapter Report

by *Kathryn Thede, President*

Sometimes a ripple isn't noticed right away but a gentle trickle whose water is felt more nearer the shore. On October 25, 2025, Wendell "Red" Thede, the man who told hunting stories to a young child and planted a seed that grew into a small forest of hunters (and huntresses) completed his journey on Earth and left those who loved him most with memories and a legacy to carry on.

My husband, Brythe, grew up listening to hunting stories, looking at pictures, and touching antlers of deer harvested by his "Pa." His parents purchased hunting land where many of our favorite memories have been made. It really is a slice of heaven on earth.

Red took my husband to hunter safety training and made sure Brythe got to hunt every opening weekend as a kid until he was old enough to drive himself to the land to go hunting. He was there in 1995 when Brythe got his first "big buck" and quite a few of the deer we've gotten since. Red never hunted that my husband got to be a part of but he planted the seed none-the-less. From there Brythe got me more into hunting when we were dating. He introduced it to our son, Zach, who introduced it to his wife, Jodi, while they were dating. Some of our favorite family traditions revolve around hunting, from the Friday fish fry the night before gun hunting to Thanksgiving dinner cooked in crockpots and Nesco's so we can all enjoy some time in the deer stand before dark-thirty and still enjoy a nice hot traditional dinner (including a turkey harvested during hunting season), to the "original 4-wheeler" a 1955 Farmall 300 helping to drag out the big buck, a New Year's Eve party at the cabin with surf and venison turf on the grill and the better half of a million memories of a life well lived and time well spent. I bet he had no idea how much of an impacted he started with what was probably just little conversations between a father and his young child touching the lives of many more people for years and possibly generations to come. My challenge to each of you is to tell the stories, show the pictures, share the jerky, have the conversations because your ripple



and your legacy is being made even if you aren't watching the water.

Expo season is almost here, and it is another of my favorite traditions. My third date with Brythe was to the hunting show in Green Bay in 2000, before I knew what SCI was. We've gone every year since and started attending the SCI banquets shortly after. We can't count the number of friends we've made and things we've learned attending those shows and banquets. Funny story, one of the first SCI events we went to was at Lambeau and this guy named Boddington was doing a presentation on "buffalo" and naïve me thought it was on American bison. It wasn't. I have learned so much in the past 25 years!

The Wisconsin Hunting and Fishing Expo (February 27, 28, and March 1, 2026) is a great outing for the entire family! There is always a variety of vendors, literally something for everyone (including the kiddos!) Our SCI banquet and fundraiser will again be held at Stadium View on Saturday, February 28, 2026. Tickets are ready, for more

information or to purchase yours please call Zach Thede (our chapter's treasurer) at 920-659-0868. We would love to have you join us! There will be a live auction, silent actions, raffles, raffles, and more raffles! Mary Reetz, Kevin Ott, Sami LaCourt, Marty LaCourt, Cal Ort, and Mark Snyder always have the auctions set up with sweet finds and awesome adventures! Tommy Kiel does an amazing job getting a good variety of things that go "Bang" (and their accessories)! Zach and Jodi Thede, Betsy Harrison, Mark Schultz, and Bobbie Windus do a ton of stuff behind the scenes to keep things flowing smoothly! And of course, we would be lost without Mark Jablonic helping to keep things going and encouraging us to up our bids! Please visit NEWISCI.org for the most up to date information on our chapter, including our live auction items. As always please free to reach out with any questions or concerns that I can help you with (920) 450-0765. I look forward to seeing you at the SCI booth at EXPO and at the banquet in a few short weeks!!

Conservation:

Archery Trade Gives \$47 Million

The Archery Trade Association is sharing the most recent Federal Excise Tax collections for archery products, as reported by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service for the quarter ending Sept. 30, 2025.

According to the newly released data, total FET collections for archery products in the final quarter of fiscal year 2025 reached \$10,636,988, bringing the

fiscal year-to-date total to \$47,710,826. These funds include:

- Bows, Quivers, Broadheads \$8,699,008 this quarter with \$39,059,701 year-to-date; and
- Arrow Shafts \$1,937,980 this quarter with \$8,651,125 year-to-date.

The Internal Revenue Service has reported that the 2026 per arrow shaft tax rate is \$0.65.

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Wisconsin Chapter Report

by Dean LePoidevin, President

Welcome to 2026 and the first HUNTERS magazine article of the year.

As you can see from the photo, my 2025 Wisconsin bow season harvest was a success. I had seen this deer only twice on one of the cell cameras I have placed in the property, so I was surprised when he showed up mid-morning about 100 yards from the stand I occupied. I witnessed him checking a scrape and working the licking branch. When finished, he approached the blind and turned when I stopped him and shot. He did not make it 40 yards. Biggest bow buck of my life.

I trust many of my fellow SCI WI chapter members have had similar luck this past season and that some of us may be heading out for the extended season, ending January 31, 2026. Good luck and be safe.



SCI WI members Jeff Belongia, Harry Mattox and Dan Gorecki with their impressive Australian trophies.

The Wisconsin chapter has enjoyed excellent participation in our monthly meetings this past year at various locations throughout the southeastern portion of the state. The upcoming January meeting promises to be another entertaining evening, to be held on the 15th at

Alioto's on Mayfair Road in Wauwatosa. Join your fellow members to hear about an exciting Asian Water Buffalo and Banteng hunt on exclusive Aboriginal land in the Northern Territory of Australia.

SCI members across Wisconsin and Illinois are invited to attend our 49th Annual Banquet and Fundraiser held again this year at the Brookfield Conference Center on Friday & Saturday, February 13-14, 2026. Featured will be outfitters from across the Midwest and North America, as well as several international guides. There will be a youth event on Saturday, Saturday afternoon and evening. Free scoring of your Wisconsin trophies, meet with hunter and producer Melissa Bachman, raffles, trip packages, hunting equipment, interactive games and prizes, and gun boards will be available to attendees.



The public is encouraged to attend free of charge on Saturday from 10:00 am to 3:00 pm. See www.sciwi.org for further details and tickets.



Special this year will be a celebration of Valentine's Day on Saturday evening. Bring your special Valentine for a chance to win free prizes. See www.sciwi.org for details.

Hope to see you all at the Banquet in February!



SE WI Bowhunters Chapter Report

by Dan Trawicki, President

I have to admit its hard to be writing this on November 15 when I still have an open deer tag! I hope everyone is having a great fall and getting out in the woods. I recently had a chance to host Steve Cripps and Mark Jablonic who were the winning bidders for a three-day hunt at my farm in Buffalo County. I donated this hunt the past few years to raise money for our state-wide conduit fund. 100% of the proceeds go into the account. Both Steve and Mark saw quite a few bucks but nothing big. Weather was an issue,

but we all made the most of it, and had fun.

The bow chapter continues to work toward its original goal of working with legislators that support our hunting mission and heritage. In that regard, we have made a conscious decision to go all in for the next Governors race. We know very well that without a Governor that supports our constitutional right to hunt and fish, any new proposed legislation has little chance to succeed. As a 501 C 4 chapter we are allowed to lobby and donate to legislative elections. While all elections are important,



none will be a big as this next Governor's race.

Once again, we will be having our March banquet at the Golden mast in Okauchee. Details will be coming out soon. Time to head back to the woods and up a tree! Gotta love this time of year!!

Illinois & Chicago Chapter

Santa was checking out the gun raffle at the SCI Illinois & Chicago Chapter's Christmas Brunch, according to SCI Region 16 Representative Charmaine Wargolet, who said, "Dasher and Prancer, mind your manners!"

Wargolet praised the chapter's leadership and members for another first

class event. The chapter has a reputation for organizing and hosting some of the best fundraisers in North America, with fine food, fun activities, great prizes, and friendly atmosphere filled with camaraderie among members and guests.



Wisconsin PR Funding

Wisconsin's rich history of wildlife conservation, land stewardship and the hunting tradition is well known. However, many people don't know that that these activities are funded through federal aid in the Wildlife Restoration Program (also known as the Pittman-Robertson Act of 1937). The connection between firearm ownership and wildlife conservation has historically been through hunters, who were considered the main "users" of wildlife when the Pittman-Robertson Act was passed into law. However, while hunting participation in Wisconsin is declining, interest in shooting sports and recreational shooting remains strong.

How Firearm Ownership Supports Conservation

The Pittman-Robertson Act funnels a special tax on firearms and ammunition to state wildlife agencies. The tax

funding (11% of the manufacturer's retail price of every gun and box of ammunition) is earmarked for state agencies to do conservation work, like purchasing and managing habitat on public lands, teaching hunter education and outdoor skills and constructing and maintaining public shooting ranges. Wildlife Restoration funds cannot legally be allocated to anything but conservation.

In fact, the federal Office of Inspector General shows up at the Wisconsin DNR every six years to audit these funds and make sure they're being properly used. We're due for our next audit to begin in September 2025, and we appreciate the opportunity to show off all the conservation work we do with Wildlife Restoration dollars.

Pittman-Robertson funding ensures recreational shooters have a designated, safe place to shoot. The state of

Wisconsin owns 11 shooting ranges that provide a safe experience to the meet the demand of public recreational target shooters.

How You Can Help

Take a Hunter Safety class. The DNR offers Hunter Education classes that teach firearm safety in a hunting context. We encourage all firearm owners to take a firearm safety class, whether they plan to hunt or not. These classes are open to the public.

Go to a range and shoot safely. If you own a firearm, you can help conservation by going out and shooting safely at a designated shooting range. Every box of ammunition purchased helps state agencies conduct wildlife conservation work.

Learn to hunt. If you want to bring your firearm to the field and fill your freezer, consider signing up for a Learn to Hunt or Outdoor Skills program.

Badgerland Chapter Report

by Randy Mayes, President

One season leads to another! As avid hunters we know that our desire for the "pursuit" never ends. Just because many of the hunting seasons have come to an end, that doesn't mean our drive to do that next hunt ends.

Sure, there is always something to hunt, somewhere, 365 days a year. But for many, the next few months are somewhat of an "off season." It may be an off season for actually going out hunting but much of the beginning stages of planning for next fall begin this time of year. This is Planning Season.

Many western states have application deadlines coming up soon. If you are going to be hunting with an outfitter, you may need to book that hunt for next fall now. If you will be starting food plots this spring, you need to start planning that.

You get the point. There's always something to plan!

If you're considering doing an outfitted hunt, one of those stages in the "Planning Season" is finding the right outfitter. In the next few months, you will have SO many opportunities to attend SCI banquets. Many of these give you the chance to talk directly with outfitters and get all your questions answered. They all have auctions which just may allow you to get a deal on a hunt you thought you could never afford to do! If you're a seasoned SCI member, you are already well aware of this. If you're new to SCI and you haven't yet been to one of these, you REALLY need to attend! Not only is it just a fun time, but it can also open so many opportunities for you with regards to hunting.

The Badgerland "Hunter's Expo" is February 13-14 at Chula Vista Resort in



SCI Member Referrals

Wisconsin Dells. This year, in addition to all of the great guns to give away and awesome hunts to auction off, you will have the opportunity to chat with Craig Boddington! If you've never been, do yourself a favor and try it out! If you've been before, I'm sure you will make the right choice and will be there again! Go to www.scibadgerland.com for more info!

Legislative Report

by Dan Trawicki, Lobbyist

Wolves, Sandhill cranes and the Knowles Nelson stewardship fund are all big topics on the lobbying front. AS you may be aware, Congressman Tiffany (and Governor candidate) has introduced a bill to delist our wolves. Now that the state has a comprehensive wolf management plan, were hoping for a wolf season in the near future. As a former member of the wolf study committee, I always felt that the refusal of the DNR to establish a firm harvest goal based on population and carrying capacity was a problem. Our original goal was 350 wolves in the state. The DNR has never believed this number and felt because it was done by legislative action it was not accurate. Recently Sen. Stafsholt and Rep Green have introduced LRB 1781/1 which would require the state to establish a specific number of wolves for our state. I will be monitoring that and keep you posted.

Our Sandhill crane bill has been hashed and rehashed. A lot of work has been put into this bill. We are heading in the right direction. The biggest question that remains is the willingness of the Governor to sign the bill if it gets that far. The Senate has scheduled a meeting for Wednesday November 19th. We have

wide support across the state from hunting organization, farmers and legislators.

Lastly The Knowles Nelson stewardship bill is moving forward. One of the biggest obstacles I have heard is the property acquisition aspect. When the states purchases private land for public

use, it is of course taken off the taxable income the state receives. AS we continue to purchase property the tax deficiency continues to grow. AB612 is the most recent bill introduced. This bill would continue to fund Knowles-Nelson until 2030 with some specific reductions in funding .

NRF Honors Bochert, LaBarbera

Natural Resources Foundation of Wisconsin in December unanimously granted Emeritus status to outgoing board members Linda Bochert and Mark LaBarbera. Chair David Adam praised Bochert's 21 years of service, including work on Bylaws and Governance. He noted, "Linda is a guiding voice leading us in careful deliberation on major issues. Always thoughtful, patient, and considerate, Linda has been an exemplary leader in the growth and expanding conservation work of the Foundation."

Former Board Chair Kristine Krause delivered LaBarbera's nomination, saying, "Mark has served NRF 11 years, mostly in official leadership positions as Treasurer (2015-2018), Vice Chair (2019-2020), and Chair (2021-2022), and

has led by example. Mark has made a positive difference that will benefit hunters, anglers, conservation and natural resources long into the future." Learn more at www.wisconservation.org and www.OHECyes.org.



Board Chair David Adam, Exec. Dir. Dave Clutter, and past Chair Kris Krause recognized NRF Directors Emeritus Mark LaBarbera and Linda Bochert.

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7:30PM **SATURDAY EVENING DINNER** BUSINESS CASUAL ATTIRE

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Donations If you are able to donate any items or services which will help add to the quality of our fundraising efforts, please contact Jen Bachmann at (262) 437-0097 or email at office@sciwi.org

SCI Wisconsin Chapter is a 501(c)(3) corporation. Your donation is tax deductible.

APPEARING BOTH DAYS

Melissa Bachman - is an American hunter, producer, and host of hunting television programs, currently of the cable television program Winchester Deadly Passion on the Sportsman Channel, Pursuit Channel, and Wild TV.





*The Northeast Wisconsin Chapter
of Safari Club International
Cordially invites you to our
"27th ANNUAL SCI HUNTER'S BANQUET"
and "HUNTER EXPO 2026"*

Our "27th Annual SCI Hunter's Banquet" will be held Saturday February 28th at the "Stadium View Bar & Grill" in Green Bay, WI. Enjoy an evening of fine dining with friends and family, followed by our Famous Live Auction, along with Firearms and Merchandise Raffles.

Our "Saturday Night Live Auction" will feature Hunts, Trips and Adventures from Wisconsin to Africa, South America to Europe, Art Work and More.

"Bucket Raffles" to include firearms from, Ruger, Smith & Wesson, Tikka, Winchester, Browning, Savage, Kimber, Glock, Colt, Springfield and Optics from Vortex just to mention a few.



"Hunter Expo 2026" will be held in conjunction with "The Wisconsin State Hunting and Fishing Expo" at the Resch Expo in Green Bay, WI.

Visit with over 180 Outfitters, Professional Hunters, Retailers, Lodge Owners and Taxidermists from around the world.

Bring in your Trophies and have them scored by "Official SCI Scorers", then enter them into our Trophy Competition. First and second place plaques will be awarded for all categories.

The "SCI President's Award" will be judged on "The One-Shot Rule" and only SCI Members are eligible for this Trophy.

For the kids we have the SCI Laser Shot, Kid's Archery Game, the Wisconsin Hunter's Ed air gun range, and the "Touch of the Wild Trailer".

Remember that over 70% of all the money raised at this banquet stays right here in Wisconsin to help protect your hunting rights, educate our teachers and youth, and conduct conservation and humanitarian projects.



Saturday Night Banquet Tickets are only \$75.00 per person and include free admission to the Wisconsin State Hunting and Fishing Expo.

**FOR MORE INFORMATION CALL OR text 920-659-0868 / 920-450-0765
OR VISIT WWW.SCIHUNTEREXPO.COM**



*Safari Club International
Northeast Wisconsin Chapter
27th Annual SCI Hunter's Banquet
Saturday February 28, 2026
at the "Stadium View Bar & Grill" in Green Bay, WI
Ticket Reservation Form*

**SEATING IS LIMITED – MAKE YOUR RESERVATION EARLY!
SATURDAY NIGHT DINNER WILL BE ASSIGNED SEATING.**

Item	Quantity	Cost	Total
Saturday Night Dinner Ticket plus 1 pass to the Wisconsin State Hunting and Fishing Expo (\$85 Total Value)		\$75.00	
Saturday Night Dinner Table - 8 Dinner Tickets plus 8 passes to the Wisconsin State Hunting and Fishing Expo (\$680 Total Value)		\$600.00	
I am unable to attend this event but would like to donate to assist you in protecting our Hunting Rights.			
GRAND TOTAL			

Banquet Guest Names if Available:

1. _____ 2. _____ 3. _____ 4. _____
5. _____ 6. _____ 7. _____ 8. _____

Must register at Stadium Bar & Grill to receive your WI State Hunting and Fishing Expo Pass. Saturday Night Dinner Tables must be paid with 1 check.

*Dinner Tickets and Expo Passes will be available for pickup @ the Registration Booth.
Raffle Ticket Packages and Chapter Rifle Tickets will be available at the event!!!*

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Signature: _____

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Call or Text Zach at 920-659-0868 or Kathryn at 920-450-0765
or visit www.scihunterexpo.com for more information.**

Hilgers' Successful 6th S.A. Safari



Hilgers' Sable was a dream come true on his sixth safari in South Africa.

by *Bill Hilgers*

On my 2025 sixth Safari to South Africa, and my second to Zeekoepan Safaris in the Kwa-Zulu Natal, my main animals were Cape Buffalo, Red Duiker and Sable. This would be my second buffalo with them and my second try for a Red Duiker. I saw just a couple glimpses of the little creatures the last time there. I added the Sable because of a great price, and I've always wanted one since I first saw a Sable in 2010.

My choice in rifle this time was a Model 70, in .375 H&H. I shoot this rifle well, it liked Barnes X bullets (300 gr.) and its recoil was what I considered a love tap. Loads were worked up months in advance for a 50-yard zero on the scope, with little change at 100 yds. Later I'll get into the story of serial number, 4457 and SAPS license.

We left the US from Newark and, after the 15 hours of flight time, made it to Johannesburg and then to what kept me sane in the air, Afton Lodge,

cold beer, great food, shower and comfy bed. Next morning back to the airport and to Richards Bay, a short flight with Pien our PH waiting there to take us to camp. Once there, we enjoyed the usual snacks, settled in, checked the rifle, at supper, sat at the fire and prepared for the next day.

On the truck early and out looking for the old buffalo bulls, that with the help of the wind, evaded us for the day. Next day out again with a couple of stalks being busted by the wind



What a stud! The Cape Buffalo is also impressive.



was a great animal. Most people I tell about it look at me strangely, wondering why I'd go to such lengths for a small animal, but if you are an African hunter, you get it.

Day 4 was the Sable, a short trip to a different concession that reportedly had three very nice animals. We traveled lots of rough trails up and down steep hills until, at the top of one, we spotted a Sable.

changing as we got close. That afternoon we did catch a break and got to 40 yards from a pair of old bulls sort of in some brush. After a short wait that seemed like hours, I got the shot, and after a short tracking, found it down and put in that security shot to be sure. Another nice set of horns for the wall and they are kind of addicting to hunt.

Day 3 was off to a nearby concession for the Red Duiker and as we were checking out the new area, Pien's 1st time there, we started to see little red flashes. Soon we had seen several but

And then came the stalk. But first we had to let a couple other hunters clear out of our way. We dropped off the truck as we got near to where Pein thought it was, and when we saw him, we had to move parallel to the Sable as it walked. It then turned toward us, and I had to make a head on shot as it looked us over. I hate that kind of shot, but with Pein's help, made what I thought was a shaky, no time for



and Willem made us feel more like family and friends than clients. We even had a dog, Norma, (a bloodhound) with us most the time.

Now for the serial # story, it started with the 4457 Customs form, where the



"G" was put in as a "6" and then copied into the SAPS paperwork waiting for me in Johannesburg. Upon arrival the



sticks, head on shot and he went 50 yards and dropped. That brought a sigh of relief. With my three animals out of the way, Vicki and I then got to kick back and take in more of Africa. Vic was talked into hunting over a waterhole one afternoon. Watching for game, keeping an eye on the hippos in the pond, and being on alert for a croc that was somewhere, we had another great day. We also got close to lions, elephants, rhinos and so many other animals. Amanda

SAPS was checked against the rifle and went unnoticed. Next day as we flew to Richards Bay it again wasn't noticed until we got to Richards Bay where the official did catch it and said he would get it cleared up, OK, so fast forward to leaving Richards Bay. They were more interested in my ammo and, when it came to the rifle, a funny squiggly was put in the book that could have been a "6" or "G". So in Johannesburg it passed through all the officials again and was put on the plane. Now when we got to US Customs in Newark, and they were checking my rifle against the 4457, it was noticed, but the Customs Agent looked at me and said, There's a problem, I see how it could happen, get a new correct 4457 before you travel again.

The moral for fellow SCI members is to DOUBLE check your paperwork before you travel!

Lastly, if you haven't gone to Africa, "GO!" It's a great place with wonderful people and unbelievable wildlife.



Bill's Red Duiker impressed PH Pien and his team.



A hippo nearby captures Bill & Vicki's attention.



Having someone special with you enhances the safari.

Getting close to elephants, giraffes, lions, Cape Buffalo, and other animals was common.

they were moving too fast to check genders. The PH and Game Manager decided on setting up over a water hole and waiting for them to show up.

Just as we started to walk in, one was sighted in the weeds drinking, so we moved fast with the sticks and using the PH's 30.06 at 100 yards, waited for it to be ID'd as a shooter. Got the familiar "SHOOT" from Pien and touched the trigger. And one more of the Tiny Ten was down. When we got up to it everyone was very excited, especially me because after two trips I had shot one, but the PH and Game Manager were excited too because of the size of the horns. I didn't realize 3"



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Hunt Report:

You *Can* Hunt *Cans* at Delta Marsh's Bull *Can* Lodge

Duck Your Falls with Shots & Volleys, Fa la la la la



by Mark LaBarbera

*'T*is the season to be jolly, fa la la la la, la la la.

The night before Christmas, all through our house, not a creature was stirring, not even a mouse. The

grandkids were tucked in bed, and my hunting socks were hung to dry as I basked in the warm thoughts of the fall season.

With a cocktail in hand instead of warm milk and Santa's plate of cookies, I sat in silence and savored the memories of recent hunts. No regrets or

feelings of would've or should've, only satisfaction. Deer and bear and turkey, oh my, simply satisfying, for sure. But wetlands and waterfowl memories





During construction, only Bryan Muche had a clear vision of what The Bull Can Lodge would become.

Smith, Joe Steur III, and Jim Henning offering a cold beer. As I sit here this winter warmed by the memories, I'm reminded that I cherish the camaraderie and friendships as much as, or more so than, the shots and volleys of adventures afield at great destinations.

Muche described Delta's history, "For more than 100 years, the accomplished and discerning hunters have sojourned to Manitoba, Canada and this historic landscape to find superb duck shooting and the finest canvasback hunting in the world. In 1901 the Duke of York, later King George V, and his royal hunting party spent several days hunting from a

moved me most, and I pledged to make future Fall seasons more like this one.

I smiled as I sat next to the fire and recalled many days on the Mississippi River in Wisconsin, and arriving early last season at historic Tin City, Manitoba on the great Delta Marsh. It was a dream come true. As a boy growing up on the outskirts of West Allis, I read *Sports Afield's* Jimmy



Paul Smith's roasted canvasback was so good it makes your hair stand up! He advocates using the entire game bird instead of only the breast meat.

Robinson stories about Clark Gable, European royalty, industry tycoons, and celebrities who flocked to Delta Marsh for amazing waterfowling. So, when friend Bryan Muche invited me to hunt with him at The Bull Can Lodge, a comfortable cabin he crafted with sleeping loft for six hunters, there arose such a clatter as I sprang from my bed like nothing else mattered. Then, when I arrived, what to my wondering eyes should appear, but Paul

Muche and Smith share a love of hunting and wild game like Smith's roasted canvasback that he plucked whole, cooked, and served Joe Steur and others.



The cozy kitchen provided what hunters needed.

modest hunting lodge nestled in the center of the cattail marsh. Ernest Hemmingway, John Wayne, Roy Rogers, Robert Stack, Tom Selleck and many other celebrities have hunted here. Renown wildlife artists Les Koubas, Ogden Pleissner, Sir Peter Scott, the Hautman brothers and David Mass have hunted here annually



Bryan Muche designed The Bull Can Lodge with vintage décor.

and used the marsh to create stirring works of art."

Muche recalled, "In 2014, I experienced the Delta Marsh for the first time while visiting the York Lodge, a shooting camp and parcel purchased in 1926 by James Ford Bell (Founder of General Mills). Bell, a forward-thinking sportsman, started a waterfowl research facility known as the "Delta Duck Station" and the hunter conservation organization that later became known as Delta Waterfowl Foundation.

In 2020 John Childs (a Florida businessman) also enamored of canvasbacks and the storied history of this waterfowl staging area purchased the York Lodge & Bell property with an enthusiastic interest and enduring commitment to ensure the Delta Marsh remains one of North America's crown jewel wetlands. Historically, private shooting camps once dotted the perimeter of this hunting promised land until the 1920's when conservation wardens consolidated these scattered camps into a single area of crown land, now known as Tin Town. Situated in the center of the Delta Marsh, this waterfowl hunting community consists of approximately 25 active shooting lodges permitted and regulated by the province of Manitoba and held by a select few leaseholders. The Delta Marsh remains a "bucket list" destination that overflows with history and origins of waterfowl research. Today this wetland is abundant with migrating waterfowl and sparse hunting pressure due to its "no motor" restriction and many hunters drawn to hunt fields instead of water, both factoring into the preservation of this surreal, undisturbed setting to enjoy good hunting."

I smile by the fire here as I write this just as I grinned next to The Bull Can's fireplace among vintage décor at the end of each shooting day. Though physically exhausted and feeling the neglected healthy of my 68-year-old body's aging joints, I savored each



evening and the telling of tales. And I am forever grateful that younger camp mates lightened my load hiking to and from the canoes (no motors are allowed). Cleaning birds was a pleasure. I would have gladly cleaned them all for everyone with gratitude for them doing the paddling and heavy lifting, including rescuing me from the thick muck and water-filled hip boots that left us laughing.

Now, dry and warm, I'm reminded of the holiday verse:

"He had a broad face and a little round belly

That shook when he laughed like a bowl full of jelly.

He was chubby and plump—a right jolly old elf,

And I laughed when I saw him... in the mirror, it was myself!

Despite physical limitations, and a few warmer days plagued with mosquitos the size of snipe, I enjoyed one of the best waterfowl adventures ever, including about a dozen different species of ducks and geese. It somewhat reminded me of prior falls and wingshooting with friend Kevin Casey in Alberta, and with friends and family near Ferryville and Stoddard, Wisconsin. Steady wingshooting throughout the mornings are forever etched in memory along with colorful



Joe Steur III admired his first canvasback.



sunrise scenes and intoxicating aromatic blends of chilled air, sweat, gun powder and marsh gas.

As Muche noted, "There is no equal to your own personal experience in the outdoors. Dynamic encounters burgeon deep feelings of appreciation, create awareness and build value for our outdoor heritage, our relationship with wild places, wildlife and each other. Healthy, active outdoor lifestyles and a connection to nature is good for the individual and for the environment."

He's right when he says The Bull Can is an ideal place to create personal connections and memories that will last a lifetime. Designed and built for waterfowl hunters, it is a special place to share history, celebrate tradition and instill values of honor and responsibility in future generations of waterfowlers.

It warms my heart to know that Muche is committed, as he says, "to share the ways of the old duck hunters with small groups of novice hunters in the nostalgic Bull Can shooting lodge. Our goal is to introduce and inspire those new to hunting, including youth, adult-onset hunters and conservation-minded individuals wanting to understand and experience the hunting lifestyle. This is a unique collaborative effort in cooperation with the Outdoor Heritage Education Center, a 501c3 organization, connecting youth and adults to our natural resources since



invaluable gift to those touched by this program. Join us in energizing new champions of our outdoor lifestyle by igniting a flame of connection through mentored experiences at The Bull Can." You can reach Bryan Mucbe in Mequon at 608-295-7755.



Mucbe tossed decoys in the early morning light.



Even an old gray-beard, given time, can make the short hike from the lodge to the shore.



Joe Steur tries Jim Henning's method of cleaning. For transport, birds must have at least one wing attached for identification.

Jim Henning's wild game meals include pheasant bacon cheddar bratwurst and duck/goose sweet buck & bite brats.



A warm day brought a fresh mosquito hatch.

Merry Christmas to all, and to all a good night.



The lodge has a sleeping loft, catwalk, and room for gear.

1998. Assisting in identifying appropriate program participants is Mark Kakatsch and the Horicon National Wildlife Refuge's Learn to Hunt Program.

Kakatsch, VP of Wisconsin Wildlife Federation, has led a 'Best in Class' program providing waterfowl education and mentored hunts for novice hunters since 2001 and will assist in identifying qualified program participants."

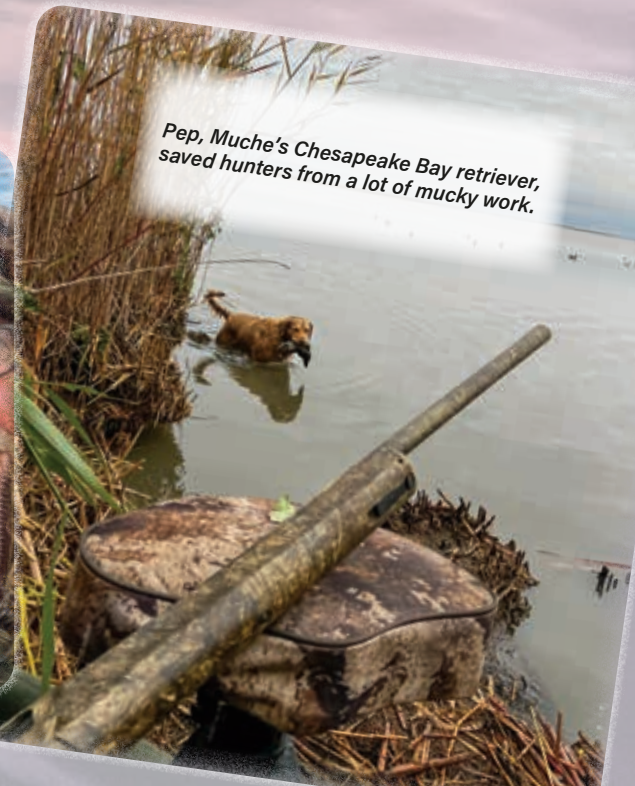
Mucbe is hoping in the warm afterglow of the holiday season, you will give the gift of hunting to the next generation. As he put it, "Only with your support can we pass along our traditions in this very special way. Your contribution is needed to provide an



Mucbe and Smith shy away from publishing photos of the group's birds that hung on rake heads before cleaning.



Bryan Mucbe embraces traditional duck hunting methods and gear.



Pep, Mucbe's Chesapeake Bay retriever, saved hunters from a lot of mucky work.



Humanitarian Services:

Big Al Charity Pheasant Hunt Makes Dreams Come True

by Rick Rollo

Sunday, October 5th, 2025, promised to be a very warm day especially for the beginning of October but as the sun rose so did the anticipation for the 27th Annual Big Al Charity Pheasant hunt.

The hustle and bustle started at 7:00am with the set-up of registration, the unloading of raffle prizes, hot cups of coffee, conversations and storytelling so familiar to participants of the tower shoot. At 8:00am registration opened and 46-plus shooters gathered to support a charity that over the years has raised in excess of \$400,000.00 for disabled Vets and sick children wishing to experience an outdoor adventure we so often take for granted.

Soon after the mandatory safety meeting the action started with a total of 520 pheasants released from the tower in two different groups. The action was fast and furious as the birds flew with the increasing wind making it increasingly challenging for all.

When the shooting was over all retired to the Wern Valley clubhouse for lunch, adult beverages and a chance to win one (or more) of the fabulous raffle prizes donated by participants and others.

When the dust finally settled for the day, the total raised at this year's event exceeded \$22,000.00!

These funds, distributed through SCI Wisconsin Chapter, have funded such projects as muskie fishing for Purple Heart disabled Veterans in Eagle River, suicide prevention for veterans through the Wisconsin War Memorial, a black bear hunt with Guide Mike Fuge for Calin Volsencek, a young man diagnosed with brain cancer, and the construction and scheduling of a portable hunting blind for veterans, youth, and people with mobility challenges that Outdoor Heritage Education Center nonprofit group will make available for free.

Obviously, an event like this does not happen without the generosity and efforts of many people, far too many to list but two that are critical to the success. Wern Valley Sportsman's Club and MacFarlane Pheasants are huge supporters of this event and have been for many years. Without their participation this event wouldn't even begin to happen.

So, until next year's 28th Annual Big Al Charity Hunt thank you to all that make this such an amazing success!



DIY Moose

by Tim Larson

My friend Mike Otto and I were disappointed – but not surprised – when we found out that we hadn't been selected for a draw tag in Alaska's Wildlife Management Unit (WMU) #21E. Very few tags are available in this highly desirable WMU, and the majority of them are allocated to Alaskan residents. Since we didn't draw a tag in that unit, Plan B was to embark on a do it yourself (DIY) hunt in an over-the-counter tag WMU, and we settled on WMU 16B – a management unit I have brown bear hunted previously with our son, who is an Alaskan resident.

Mike and I are both NW Wisconsin natives, with Mike being from Barron and myself having been born and raised in Superior. To help put the challenges and trials of this particular DIY moose hunt into context, Mike is 72 years old

and I am 66 years old. Mike had never been to Alaska, and this was also to be his first moose hunt. I had hunted moose with my bow in Ontario many years ago but had never called moose or harvested one. Mostly due to our ages, as well as the sheer size of an Alaskan bull moose, we agreed prior to the hunt that we would only shoot a moose very near where a float or tundra-tired bush plane could land. Packing 250+ lb. hind quarters any distance through uneven, boggy terrain just wasn't something we're physically capable of doing.

Prior to the hunt Mike and I each shared what we were hoping to get out of the hunt. Neither of us had high expectations of taking a trophy moose, as we had never really hunted them before. We both agreed that simply taking in the majestic beauty and

remoteness of Alaska were high on our lists. Surviving the ten days was also high on our list.

Out of sheer love and concern, my wife, daughter, son, and daughter-in-law questioned the sanity of two older and inexperienced moose hunters embarking on a ten-day DIY hunt in an extremely remote area of Alaska. Most of their concern centered around our ability to pack out a 1,500 lb. bull moose. As it turns out, their concerns were well founded.

Both Mike and I are retired, and both of us could have afforded a much "easier" guided moose hunt. However, the sense of gratification and accomplishment of doing it ourselves – which may be associated with our generation – led us down the DIY path. There might have been some pride and aging denial involved as well.

Although it was a DIY hunt, we hired a transporter to fly us into a remote area of WMU 16B as well as an outfitter to equip us with things like a tent, cots, cooking gear, and food – both fresh and freeze-dried. Both our transporter, Alaska Air West and our outfitter, Adventure Outdoor Alaska (AOA), served us well and earned what we paid and tipped them. Jake from AOA met us at Alaska West Air's dock and helped us load the gear onto the De Haveland Otter float plane that would fly us into our remote location. Our simple camp consisted of a 4-man nylon tent pitched a mere 30 yards from shore on the small, isolated lake that the plane set down on. No fancy lodge, no guide, no one to help us – just Mike and I against whatever the Alaskan wilderness and mother nature would throw our way.

DIY drop camp hunting in Alaska wasn't new to me, as I've had the privilege of joining our son – who's an Alaskan resident – on several drop camp DIY spring Brown bear hunts. It's hard to explain the sense of insignificance you feel when you're dropped off in a remote area of Alaska and are completely isolated from civilization.

While preparing for the hunt I spent countless hours on our elliptical machine and stationary bike, and while working out I watched countless videos on both hunting and calling moose. A common theme of the hunting videos was to stay put and call, don't go chasing after distant moose or hike and call – just stay put to minimize disruption and scent contamination, and try to bring the bull to you. A very insightful moose calling video that I watched suggested that knowing when to call was more important than how you sound while calling. This person's contention was that moose are active very late in the day and prior to daybreak. I took heed to his advice, and planned to call each evening as it got dark and well before daybreak in the morning.

A note about getting in shape for moose hunting – you can't. You can get in better shape and shed a few pounds, but I would argue you can't ever be in perfect shape to pack a bull moose any significant distance. Being in shape for moose hunting is a journey with an illusionary destination.

To begin our adventure, we were flown in and dropped off on the edge of a small, isolated lake. We spent the better part of that first day pitching our 4-man Cabela's Alaskan Guide tent and getting our crude camp set up. We didn't do any calling or hunting that first day because in Alaska you can't hunt on the same day that you fly. We started calling, raking, and hunting in earnest the next day. We didn't see any moose that day, but got the vocal cords, call tube, and rake paddle dialed in, in preparation for the soon-to-be peak of the rut. That evening, I did some calling as it got dark, hoping to pull a bull in our direction overnight. As many experienced moose hunters know, it can sometimes take a wary bull moose 12 to 24 hours to come into a call.

On our second day of hunting, I crawled out of our dry tent at around 4:00 a.m. just long enough to make a few calls and do some raking. Like most

days, it was cold and raining, so I quickly returned to the tent and my warm sleeping bag. I planned to get up for the day in a few hours – around daybreak. As the pitch-black night sky began to brighten, I once again left the comfort of the tent and immediately began calling and raking – always being careful not to over-call. After a few calls I fired up the Jet Boil and made some delicious French press coffee. I'll swear to the day that I go to my grave that there is no better coffee than any coffee prepared in the wild of Alaska. As Mike joined me around the coffee pot, I heard the faint sound of a bull raking – and then grunting – coming from the thick brush to our west. I motioned to Mike as the sound of thrashing and grunting got closer. As I continued to draw the bull in, Mike grabbed his nearby Model 70 .375 magnum rifle and anxiously awaited the bull's appearance. As soon as the bull stepped out and was visible, Mike spotted the required number of brow tines on the left side of the bull's huge rack, and he immediately lowered the scope's crosshairs onto the moose's shoulder and dropped him with a single 300 grain Nosler Partition bullet. The massive 62" bull dropped a mere 70 yards from our tent, and the same



Tim enjoying the hunt



Mike and his 62" bull moose

distance to the edge of the lake. Our plan worked and was executed perfectly, having dropped the moose with the shortest possible pack anyone could hope for. Now the real work was to begin.

As Mike and I approached the downed animal we both stood in awe over the massive 62" inch rack, but even more so over the sheer size of the animal. It was huge, with no possibility of us moving it or re-positioning it to begin cutting it up. We were both overwhelmed by the task at hand but knew we just had to "put it into low gear" and get to work on removing as much usable meat as possible. Mike's experience cutting up and processing Whitetail deer was invaluable when it came to cutting up the massive moose. It took us the better part of two days to get that moose cut up and packed down to the shore where our transporter would soon pick it up. The bugs were horrific, and both of us got bit up pretty bad while we carved away on that impressive animal.

On one of the flights to Alaska, Mike was seated next to a young lady who hacked and coughed the duration of the flight – and guess what, Mike became quite sick early in the hunt. With Mike and I sharing a relatively small tent, it was inevitable that I would eventually get sick as well. After the two of us cut up and packed the moose to the lake's edge, we were both physically and emotionally exhausted. Mike had considered getting flown out when our transporter flew in to pick up the meat. Not wanting to completely abandon me while I still worked hard to fill my tag, Mike agreed to remain in camp as an extra set of eyes and ears. While on the hunt we stayed in contact with our families via our Garmin InReach GPS's. By being able to satellite text our son, who lives in Alaska, we were able to develop a contingency plan. Our plan, if I were to shoot a moose, was to have our son from Wasilla fly in and help me cut and pack the moose – and Mike would fly out on the very plane that brought our son in.

The area our camp was in was low, boggy, and wet – so we wore our stocking foot chest waders and wading boots all day, every day. The view from our camp was very limited due to the low terrain and thick foliage. We could see across the lake to the north, and roughly eighty yards across the small

lakeside clearing where our camp was. We never had a need to use the spotting scope that we had brought along, and only occasionally used our binoculars. Our binoculars were put to use when we spotted cows and calves swimming across the lake a few times, and also occasionally spotted moose on the far shoreline. One day, while in our tent recovering from our illnesses, we faintly heard what sounded like a moose grunting – but we didn't see anything when we got out of the tent. The bull moose that Mike shot was the only antlered bull that we saw during our ten days in camp.

The weather could have been worse, but it could have been much better as well. It rained every day, but not all day every day. For the most part, we just sat around camp each day, out in the rain while raking several times an hour and calling roughly once an hour. We did set up a tarp for a canopy one day, but the wind caused it to flap in a way that it could spook the moose, and the noise from the rain hitting it made hearing any raking or grunting virtually impossible. From a temperature standpoint, daytime highs were in the 45-degree range, with occasional freezing temps at night and light snow one morning.

In retrospect, we had a great hunt considering neither of us had really ever moose hunted before – or attempted to call moose. We were incredibly fortunate to have dropped that big bull only 70 yards from our tent and the shoreline, but the close proximity of the carcass did lead to some uneasiness at night. Here we were in the heart of bear country, and it was only a matter of time before a bear claimed – and potentially defended – that nearby moose carcass. We tended to sleep with "one eye open" and kept our 10mm pistol and rifles loaded and in reach.

It's hard to explain the feeling as you step off the pontoon of the float plane and shuttle your gear to shore through waist-deep water, knowing that for the next ten days you'll be sleeping in a small nylon tent

and at the mercy of whatever Alaska throws at you. For ten days you're battling against nature while living in harmony with nature. You feel fully alive yet completely helpless and vulnerable at the same time. Almost regardless of the weather – wind, rain, cold – you simply expose yourself to the elements and ride the day out looking forward to finally being dry and warm when you crawl into your sleeping bag at the end of the day. I found myself saying "this is awesome" and "this sucks," both within a 15-minute span. To put a slightly different spin on Nick Lyons' verse, "I don't go into the wild to kill something. I go to unkill parts of myself that otherwise might die".

Part of my intent in sharing our experience is to encourage other hunters to consider and pursue a quality DIY adventure, regardless of your age or financial resources. This may not be the type of exotic SCI hunt that you're used to reading about, but it is a hunt that virtually anyone can afford and pull off – as long as you recognize and respect your physical and mental limitations. All in – including license, tags, air transportation, and outfitting costs – a hunt like this can be done for well under \$10,000. Even though you can put a price on a hunt like this, the experience is priceless and the memories are forever.



Mike's moose with Mike and tent in the background

In Memoriam:

George Meyer

George Meyer, 78, died December 10 in Madison. As DNR Secretary and Wisconsin Wildlife Federation Executive Director, he brought the public, lawmakers, organizations and DNR together to clean the air and water, plan good land use, and secure recreational resources for all of us.

"George was a force of nature and important ally on key issues, and I will cherish forever all the time we spent together," said Mark LaBarbera, an SCI Life Member who became WWF's second Executive Director.

"A great conservationist and a good friend," said SCI Member Dr. Christine Thomas, Dean Emerita of UW-Stevens Point College of Natural Resources.

SCI state lobbyist Dan Trawicki said there is no one who has done more for conservation, wildlife, and hunters in Wisconsin.

Current DNR Secretary Karen Hyun told SCI HUNTERS editor Mark LaBarbera, "There is so much to be thankful for in George's work and life, and I know we will all work hard to carry his legacy forward."

SCI friend Adam Payne, former DNR Secretary, said, "The state lost a giant in conservation. I have long admired and respected George since I first met him in my early 20s. He was something special."

"George was highly intelligent, articulate and passionate in his work," former Gov. Tommy Thompson told the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel. "He loved his family, loved this state and its natural resources and truly made a huge, positive difference." Thompson appointed Meyer as DNR secretary after a change in state law made the role a cabinet position.

Born in 1947 on a New Holstein, Wis. dairy farm, Meyer learned family values of land stewardship, hard work, German-Catholic faith, and a dedication to making the world a better place.

Limited by asthma, Meyer was not destined to take over the farm. Instead, he earned a degree in Economics from St. Norbert College in Green Bay, and Law Degree from UW—Madison.

In Meyer's freshman year, he received a tip from classmate Tom Fox about a part-time DNR law clerk job. It changed his life's trajectory. George repaid the tip by working on Fox's campaign where he met the love of his life Jayne Meyer (Hase) and his partner of 52 years of marriage. Within two years, he was one of three staff attorneys. Congress passed Clean Water and Clean Air Acts.



A rare historic image captured WWF's only three Executive Directors together, Cody Kamrowski, Mark LaBarbera, George Meyer, and WWF Past President Kevyn Quamme, a Badgerland SCI Chapter member.

Meyer made use of them, the Northwest Ordinance and a little known 1878 Wisconsin Statute, The Public Trust Doctrine, to protect natural resources and to challenge pollution problems and destruction of waterways. He focused on Air Management & Water Regulation and Zoning for the DNR in 500+ trial-like administrative hearings.

He became Division of Enforcement Administrator (1980-1993). One of his greatest accomplishments during this time was developing current wetland protection regulations.

Meyer next oversaw resolution and implementation of treaty rights signed in the 1880s that allowed hunting, fishing, and gathering on off-reservation lands. He negotiated more than 43 harvest agreements that became the foundation of the lawsuit settlement between the Tribes and State.

In eight years as Secretary, his DNR was acknowledged as one of the top conservation and environmental agencies in the U.S. Meyer directed ~2900 employees with a \$468 million annual budget.

His DNR career that spanned 1972-2001. He opposed splitting the agency and was an avid supporter of women in outdoor careers. He was raised by/with, married, raised, and mentored strong women throughout his life and career. When he started as Secretary, there was one woman in a management role at the DNR. He and

his deputy prioritized promoting women, "...because I knew they had already worked harder to get to where they were, they were frequently more than qualified." When Meyer left the DNR, women held more than half of the management positions.

He was a member of the WCHF Board of Governors and was inducted into the Wisconsin Conservation Hall of Fame.

After retiring from the DNR in 2002, he worked as the first Executive Director of the Wisconsin Wildlife Federation, where Meyer continued to mobilize citizens.

In 2024-25, Meyer committed countless hours to the Federation's intervention and court appeal in the Vista Solar Sands project, helping the state-threatened Greater Prairie Chicken.

"George Meyer was one of the most influential conservation leaders in Wisconsin history," said Cody Kamrowski, WWF Executive Director. "We invite all...to honor him by fighting for conservation values you believe in. Stand with your neighbors when natural resources are threatened. Give your time to causes bigger than yourself. Treat others with dignity, seek common ground, and defend Wisconsin's outdoor heritage with the same courage...and persistence that defined George's life."



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Bob's the *Best*

by Mark LaBarbera

I was working the SCI sensory safari trailer exhibit at a sport show years ago when someone tapped me on the shoulder from behind, and I turned to see who it was.

"Do you remember me?" asked the tall man in the MAGA cap.

Bob Dohnal?

"Good memory. Been on any good adventures lately?"

And with that, we re-kindled a decades old relationship that had begun on South 112th St. and Greenfield Ave. where Mr. Dohnal was our neighborhood pharmacist. He eventually bought Larry's Rexall Drugs, which had a great selection of penny candy, baseball cards with bubble gum in every pack, and medicine for whatever ailed you.

Somewhere in the '70's I discovered our local druggist was also an avid hunter. As I finished a Journalism degree at UW-Milwaukee and pursued an outdoor media career, I came to admire Bob's hunting lifestyle,

his business acumen, and his commitment to community. I really enjoyed hearing about his adventures around the world.

So, when we reconnected at Deerfest, I jumped at his invitation to join him on his annual waterfowl hunt on the Mississippi River. Over the years, Dabblers & Divers Guide Service owner Capt. Matt Ellis, who also owns Safe Landing Motel in Stoddard, and I have shared an appreciation of Bob's storytelling abilities. From season to season, you never know what the weather or waterfowling will be, but we can always count on Bob telling us about his early days of hunting near La Crosse with his dad and about carrying burlap sacks of hand-carved wooden decoys that are a pain in the back (the decoys, not the stories).

Even when birds aren't flying, the stories are, including what I think are some exaggerated tales of being the best caller and the best shot on the river. Bob's smile as he tells certain stories is what poker players would call "his tell." He tries to prolong his straight-faced recollections, but a smirk or smile lets us know that he might be stretching the truth.

Anyone who knows Bob also knows his passion for politics and his long involvement in cycling and Olympic speed skating. Over the years, I've enjoyed our time with Capt. Matt on the river. Bob was Matt's first client, and, like most others, he books the same time slot year after year. It's not unusual for Bob to have the head of the NRA join us or to call Tommy Thompson on the river with a report about Bob's calling and shooting expertise and what the former Governor is missing.

In recent years, Bob's sons or grandson have joined us and added to my appreciation of the family's patriarch.

Here are some photos from time on the water with Bob.





The Duck Stops Here

A variety of the ducks here are puddle ducks or dabblers, usually feeding by tipping just below the water's surface rather than diving. The speculum, or colored wing patch, is shiny and bright. When they take flight, they leap directly upward, unlike the diving ducks which pounce across the water's surface to gain enough speed to become airborne.

Do you know your ducks?

1. Wood duck
2. Green-winged teal
3. Blue-winged teal
4. Gadwall
5. Northern shoveler
6. Northern pintail
7. Mallard
8. American Wigeon

**These are drakes, (males) sporting their brightly colored feathers to attract the hens, (females).*

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Here's a sample of the great prizes, silent auction and live auction items offered from past fundraisers:

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- International Hunts



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Deer Season Data

Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (DNR) celebrates the conclusion of the 2025 nine-day gun deer hunt, which kicked off the holiday season with opportunities to enjoy the outdoors, harvest food for the table, and create memories with family and friends. As this issue was going to press, these were the early license sales and harvest registration numbers.

Preliminary figures indicate the number of deer hunters in Wisconsin slightly decreased compared to 2024. As of 11:59 p.m. Sunday, Nov. 30, sales for deer hunting privileges (which include gun, archery, crossbow, conservation patron and sports licenses) reached 790,044, down 0.12% from the same time last year. Of those, 550,611 were for gun privileges only (which include gun, conservation patron and sports licenses). Deer hunting license and harvest authorization sales will continue throughout the remaining deer hunting seasons. Final license sales figures will be available in late January, when DNR staff will perform a thorough analysis and interpretation.

Preliminary Harvest Totals

Preliminary figures show hunters registered 182,084 deer during the 2025 gun deer season, including 86,068 antlered and 96,016 antlerless deer. Compared to 2024, the gun season harvest total is down 0.8% statewide, with the antlered harvest down 2.6% and the antlerless harvest up 0.9%.

Since the opening of the bow and crossbow seasons, Wisconsin hunters had registered 294,757 deer. This harvest is 1.1% ahead of the same time last year.

Marquette County in the Central Farmland Zone led the state with 7.9 deer registered per square mile. Vernon County led the Southern Farmland Zone with 6.5 deer registered per square mile. DMU 201 led the Central Forest Zone registering 3.8 deer per square mile. Finally, DMU 108 led the Northern Forest Zone with 2.7 deer registered per square mile.

The DNR's Wisconsin Deer Harvest Summary webpage contains more information regarding harvest registration totals, including county-level numbers.

The regular gun deer season ran from Nov. 22 through Nov. 30 and followed by the statewide muzzleloader season (Dec. 1-Dec. 10), the statewide antlerless-only four-day hunt (Dec. 11-Dec. 14) and the antlerless-only holiday hunt in select farmland zone counties (Dec. 24-Jan. 1, 2026).

First Harvest Certificates

Hunters of all ages who harvested their first deer are encouraged to highlight this significant occasion with a first harvest certificate available free on the DNR website.

Reagan Rose Lovas, 9, put venison in the family's freezer with her first deer and says next season she wants to "hunt horns."



SCI member Steve Whitcomb shared photos of his three daughters and their four deer, including Natalie, 16, below, with her gun and bow bucks; Cassidy, 12, above left, with her archery buck; and Brooke, 10, above right, with her first archery deer.



Social Media and Hunting

Whether you are a fan of it or not, social media has crept its way into almost everyone's lives today, even the lives of many SCI members and other hunters around the nation.

by Megan Richard, Whitetails Unlimited Communications Director & Magazine Editor

Social media is a wonderful and terrible thing for many reasons. It allows us to connect with people across the globe, from an influencer living in France to your cousin in Alaska to your best friend down the street. These days, many people share everything, and I mean everything. What you had for lunch, the deer you shot on opening day, the video of your dog chasing his tail for the tenth time (guilty as charged)... you name it.

On one hand, we are able to see, learn, and experience things that we never would have prior to the arrival of social media. We can stay up to date on distant friends and relatives, including our hunting buddies we only see once

or twice a year during the season. We can stay connected with the rest of the world and never leave our couch; some may argue this is a bad thing, but during the pandemic, I believe it helped many people get through those tough times. On Instagram and Facebook, we get an inside look into the lives of our friends, family, other hunters, and even celebrities. Twitter allows us to communicate in a mere 280 words. When sending a Snap on Snapchat, we share pictures and videos of right here, right now. And don't even get me started on the endless abyss of TikTok. One minute I'm watching a video on how to organize my pantry and the next thing I know, 20 minutes of scrolling has passed. But, really, from sharing tips and tricks on how to cook venison to connecting with friends and family during hunting

season, today we are more connected than ever, all thanks to social media.

Perception of Perfection

Social media has taken over the lives of so many. People don't pick up the phone anymore and they don't want to actually go out and see others because they are constantly comparing themselves with others through the lens of social media. The perfect perception of ourselves that we put out on social media is not always true. No one wants to show the picture of the little spike deer they shot because they need meat. Instead, we only see what they want us to see—the trophy deer with a huge rack. To achieve this so-called perfection, we are always on our phones, taking pictures, posting content, you name it. What happened to the days

when people communicated by just talking to each other? That being said, I encourage you to take this all with a grain of salt. I know plenty of people and hunters, young and old on both ends of the spectrum, who either have no social media presence or are on every single platform, and every one of them is a genuinely good person.

Be Careful What You Wish For

Once you press "post," anyone and everyone can see what you put out there, from hunters to anti-hunters and everyone in between. So, be careful. Much like "think before you speak," you should think before you post. How will your post affect others? How will others perceive you because of it? Do you really want to put it out there for everyone to see?

Where Hunting Comes into Play

By now, you're probably wondering how hunting and social media are connected. Essentially, all the things listed above can be applied to hunting. Social media should be a positive platform to bring the hunting community together; it should not pit us against each other.

The population is often broken up into three hunting categories: hunters, non-hunters, and anti-hunters. Each group has their own beliefs and their own reasons behind them. However, these groups should be taken into consideration when deciding what to share on social media. If you hunt deer, bear, ducks—you name it—you are considered a hunter and have a responsibility to other hunters. Remember, what you as a hunter choose to share with the world directly reflects on what everyone else thinks of all hunters. People are quick to make assumptions and group people together. Are you posting a video of you and your buddies grabbing some beers before heading out to the woods? Did you take a questionable shot and still post it on social media? Don't do it! Many of these things may seem obvious to some, but it only takes one bad apple to ruin it for everyone.

Non-hunters are perhaps the largest population. They don't hunt but they aren't against hunting. This being said, they can either support hunters or support anti-hunters, so hunters themselves have to take into consideration their thoughts and opinions as well. This is also the case for anti-hunters, and perhaps even more so. Anti-hunters will grab onto anything they can to support their beliefs. And let me make this clear: there is nothing wrong with supporting your beliefs, whatever they may be. But again, this goes back to thinking before you post. How will people think of me after posting this? How will my post affect the entire hunting community, and even those outside the hunting community?

Learning From Others

Just like everyone using social media, hunters learn from each other as well. We learn tips on creating food plots, the best products to use for bowhunting, and the most durable clothing for heading up in the mountains, just to name a few. As hunters, it is our responsibility to educate others, share good quality products, and congratulate and support each other. A young hunter will seriously consider the products a professional hunter posts about, so it is important that these products are of good quality and not just being posted as a brand promotion.

Hunters need to stick together. We need to be supportive of each other but also acknowledge each other's mistakes. If a hunter is being unethical, it is another hunter's duty to correct them. Now, I do not mean calling them out on their post (we definitely do not need any confrontational comment wars), but perhaps send them a direct message, be polite, let them know what they are doing wrong, and offer to help. I must stress the importance of being positive and helpful when offering this constructive criticism. All the hunters I know are some of the most helpful and nicest people, and I'm sure you could say the same. In the end, social media aside, we all just want to continue to participate in the hunting tradition we love and know so well.

Photographing Your Deer for Social Media

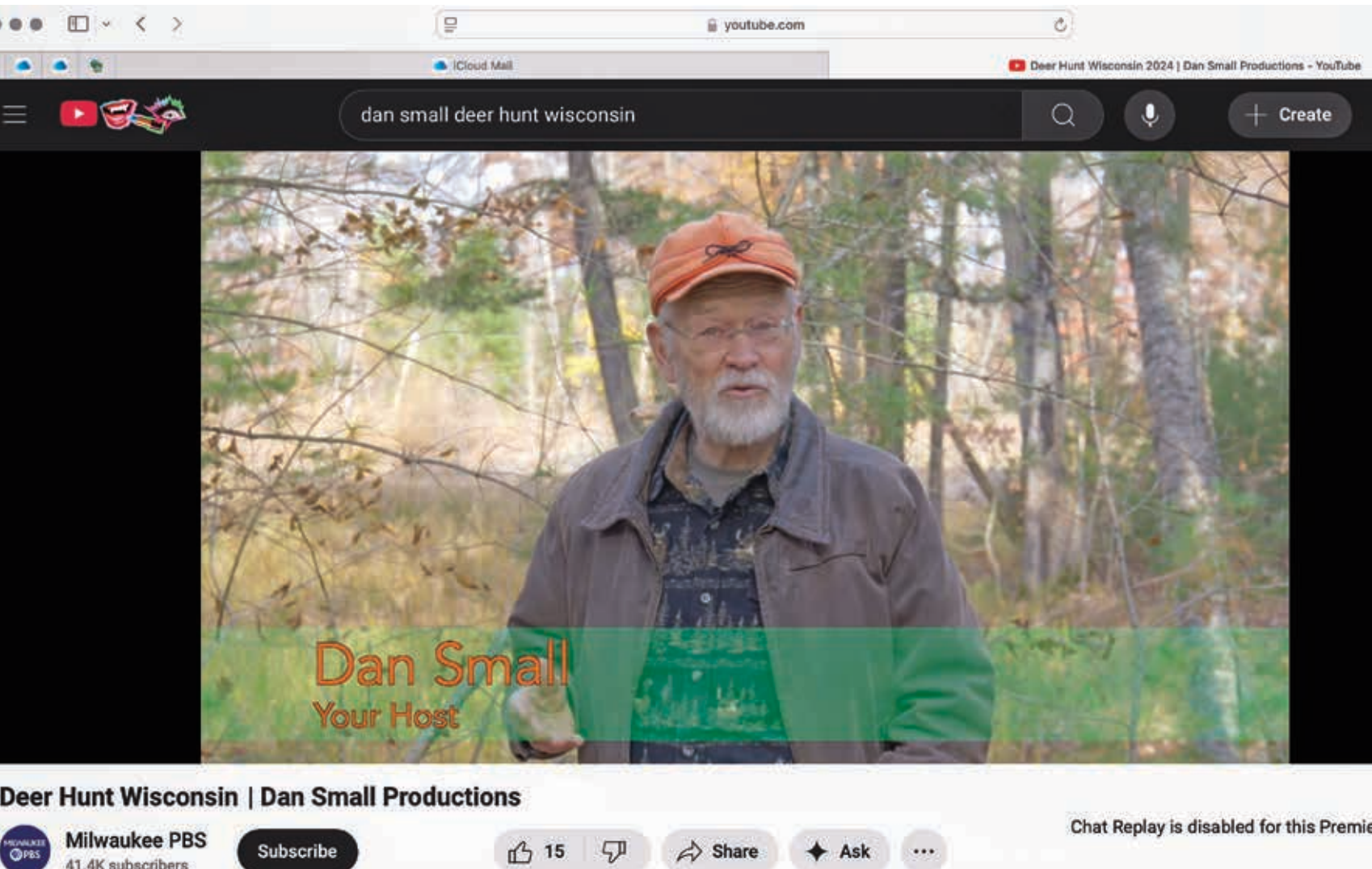
You post a picture of the trophy white-tailed deer you took on opening

day—you have a big smile on your face and you're super excited. But does the picture impact the privacy of the landowner's property you're hunting on? You could be showing a road or landmark that indicates where you were hunting. Did you happen to take off your blaze orange jacket or hat for the picture? In most states, it is a requirement to wear blaze orange during deer firearm season. Do you only post the biggest deer you get every season even though you may have shot a doe or a spike as well? You could be influencing young hunters to believe that only a trophy deer is worth shooting when, in reality it is about the hunt and the time spent outdoors and with friends and family, not the picture you post on social media.

Many people choose to share their trophy buck or their latest deer with their friends and followers. While there is nothing wrong with this, you should again be careful with what you are posting. This starts with the picture you take right after tracking down your deer. Now, I know that making sure everything is perfect in the picture is not at the top of your list of concerns, but it is still important. You should be sure to clean up your deer a little bit—no one wants to see a deer lying in a pool of blood with its tongue sticking out, especially not people who are against hunting. I suggest making sure to pack some rolls of paper towel and wet wipes to help clean your deer off quickly and efficiently. You should also take into consideration the position of your firearm. Does it appear to be pointing at you or someone else? Is your finger on the trigger? Safety should be a priority, even after the shot is taken. And last but not least, remember to take it all in—the memories and pictures you now have will last a lifetime.

Show Hunting in a Positive Light

In a nutshell, what you post can affect the entire hunting industry. So, as hunters, it's up to us to bring a positive perception of hunting to the world of social media. Whether you like it or not, social media is here to stay, and if we want hunting to remain the way it is today, we have to start being more aware of what we post. What can you do to help show hunting in a positive light?



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