

Badger Mining hosts disabled hunt

by: Nick Bartol
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Badger Mining Corporation (BMC) recently wrapped up its 15th year as a company sponsor of the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources' nine-day disabled deer gun hunt. The WDNR began the hunt in 1990 in order to provide opportunities for individuals with certain disabilities to enjoy deer hunting at a time of year in which temperatures are generally milder and mobility in the woods easier. Originally started at BMC as an opportunity for one of its now-retired associates who was injured in a swimming accident, the hunt has since grown in size for the company.

For Badger Mining, hunt-

ing began in 2001 at BMC's St. Marie's property in Green Lake County, but since then, has expanded in 2006 to include the Fairwater property in Green Lake and Fond du Lac counties, and in 2008 to include the Taylor property in Jackson County. Throughout the three properties, BMC accommodated 18 hunters this year, 14 of which were new and four that were returning. The hunters ranged in age from 27 to 72 years old, and one traveled all the way from Phoenix, Ariz., to hunt the St. Marie property.

For many of these hunters, just getting the chance to get out into the woods and potentially seeing several deer is an experience many thought they may never encounter again.

"I appreciated [my guides] helping me get out to a beauti-

ful, elevated location," comments one of the hunters. "I don't get a chance to have a sight line like that, [and] being able to see that far was awesome."

Another participant reflects on a note to his hunting guide, "My boy and I had a great time seeing deer, and from your stands to your... people, you're a topnotch company. It's nice to go in the warmer weather, and you and your company created great memories I will never forget."

Yet, as much as the hunt means to the hunters, it is arguably just as important to the guides and all who help out with this program.

"Being involved is easy for me, but I never knew just how much it meant until this year when my son, Loren, was one of the hunt-

ers," says BMC associate and long-time guide for this hunt, Rohland Parker. "After his accident last March, I would have never believed that we would be sitting in a blind together, let alone him shooting another buck he could hang on the wall... I can't say enough for what Badger Mining does for these people."

Badger Mining gladly looks forward to continuing this hunt for many years to come because, in the associates' opinion, it is just the right thing to do. "In our 15 years, we have touched 68 different hunters' lives in providing this opportunity," said Tiffany Martin, BMC associate and hunting guide. "The deer is the bonus, but the smiles and friendships that we have made over the years are truly priceless."



Chuck Kinser of Black River Falls



Loren Parker (center) of Neilsville



Larry Laehn (left) of Milton



Bill Ressel of Blair

OUTDOORS

"I love Nature partly because she is not man, but a retreat from him."

Henry David Thoreau, Journal, 1853

Program provides a big lift

Facility adapted for disabled hunters

Town of St. Marie — The late afternoon sky hung low over Green Lake County like a gray, cotton blanket, allowing only soft light to reach the ground.

At 4:30 p.m., four white-tailed deer filtered into a field on a ridge at Badger Mining Company's St. Marie facility.

The deer — one doe, two fawns and a spike buck — calmly fed about 75 yards from our hunting blind.

"They're moving early today," said Bob Bartol, 72, of Berlin.

Marty Lehman of Berlin and I nodded. With about 2½ hours left of shooting light, it promised to be an eventful sit in the central Wisconsin deer woods.

The three of us gathered during the first weekend of the 2015 Wisconsin disabled deer hunt.

Bartol, who broke his neck in a 1974 swimming accident, hunts from a wheelchair. Lehman is a wildlife biologist and occupational health specialist who has worked at Badger for 24 years.

The site of our hunt is a former sand mine between Green Lake and Berlin. Badger reclaimed the property and planted native grasses, shrubs and trees.

The site is now closed to mining, but it is opened for an annual disabled deer hunt each October.

The three of us were ensconced in a 9 by 7 foot box blind known as a "Bean-stalker." It features a hydraulic lift to allow hunters in wheelchairs access to an elevated position.

Badger purchased the blind, as well as several other stands, and placed them on the 1,000-acre property to assist the disabled hunters.

When he broke his neck, Bartol lost his ability to walk and has limited use of his arms.

He's got plenty of wit, however.

"Can you make more noise?" he asked with a sarcastic smile as Lehman adjusted gear in the blind.

Bartol was an avid hunter before his accident.

For 25 years after it, he didn't know if he'd ever hunt again.

Then Lehman learned about the state's disabled deer hunt and proposed sponsoring hunters on the Badger properties.

Lehman, also a Berlin resident, helped Bartol apply and they set out on a new adventure together. The two have developed a close relationship over the years.

"You want the whole story?" Bartol asked.

During their inaugural hunt on the property, Bartol missed a chance at a nice buck at 40 yards when his gun wouldn't fire.

"That's when he taught my son to swear," Lehman said.

Bartol began a process familiar to many disabled hunters — the search for adaptive gear.

He eventually found a trigger extension that sticks out and away from the trigger guard, allowing his hand to set off a shot. He also made a gun rest that attaches to the front of his motorized wheelchair.

Bartol has now taken many deer in the last 15 years, including several fine bucks.

"I'm pretty choosy now," Bartol said. "But the main thing is, I like getting out in nature."

The Wisconsin disabled deer hunt runs for nine days each year in early October.



Paul A. Smith

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PAUL SMITH / MILWAUKEE JOURNAL SENTINEL

Bob Bartol (left) approaches a blind specifically designed for hunters who use wheelchairs as Marty Lehman of Badger Mining Co. assists.



PAUL A. SMITH / PSMITH@JOURNALSSENTINEL.COM

Bartol settles into a hunting blind on Badger Mining Co. property in St. Marie as Lehman looks on. Bartol is disabled and has hunted from a wheelchair for 15 years.

This year the hunt took place Oct. 3 to 11.

The Department of Natural Resources enrolls sponsors of the disabled hunt and oversees the program.

To qualify, hunters must possess a valid Class A, long-term Class B that authorizes shooting from a vehicle, or a Class C or D Disabled Hunting Permit. Hunters can use firearms or bows.

Prospective hunters submit applications to the DNR and work with the sponsors to arrange the outing.

Sponsors must supply the DNR with a list of participants by Sept. 1.

For the 2015 Wisconsin disabled deer hunt, 79 individuals or organizations enrolled properties (many enroll under umbrellas so the actual number of landowners is higher) with a total acreage of 74,681 in 45 counties, according to Adam Murkowski of the DNR.

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Badger, run for four generations by the Chier and Hess families, sees the hunt as an opportunity to share their wildlife-rich properties with the public, Lehman

said. The company organizes a pre-hunt sight-in and a post-hunt pizza dinner and celebration at the Berlin Conservation Club.

Badger holds disabled deer hunts on the St. Marie property as well as its active mining sites at Fairwater in Fond du Lac County and its Taylor facility in Jackson and Trempealeau counties.

This year it hosted 18 disabled hunters on the three properties.

"You'd never know this was a mining site," Bartol said, looking out at a restored prairie.

At 4:37 p.m., a big-bodied deer stepped into a trail 150 yards from the blind.

"An 8-pointer," Lehman said as he eyed the animal with binoculars.

Bartol swung his electric wheelchair 90 degrees to the south and looked through his rifle scope.

"It's a yes," Bartol said, indicating he'd like to take a shot.

The blind grew quiet as Bartol literally used his wheelchair to aim his rifle. He then adjusted his upper body slightly to fine tune the position. And finally he touched off a shot with his right hand.

The blind reverberated. The deer jumped and ran.

Lehman and I climbed out of the blind to look for the deer. We were joined by Brandon Hess, a Badger employee, and Parker LaBudda, a volunteer. Extensive searching found no sign of a hit. Lehman and I rejoined Bartol in the blind.

Deer were visible to the last minute of legal shooting. Bartol elected not to take another shot. Lehman unloaded Bartol's rifle and cased it. Light faded from the field.

"Next time," Bartol said, as he maneuvered his wheelchair out of the blind. "This program has helped me look forward to the next time."

To participate as a hunter or to sponsor a disabled deer hunt on your property, visit dnr.wi.gov/topic/hunt/disdeer.html.

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