

Bow & Youth Hunting Guide



2025



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Obeying state hunting laws can save you big bucks

Baiting, hunting with wrong permits head violations

By **ROSS BIELEMA**
Correspondent

There are two kinds of game-law violators, according to a Shawano game warden: Those who mess up through ignorance and those who do it because they don't care.

There's still a chance of avoiding a fine or even civil penalties and equipment forfeitures if Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources game warden Clark Delzer stops you: Simply be honest and fess up, he advises.

Delzer has been a Shawano County game warden for 10 years, splitting duties in the county with warden Mark Schraufnagel. He's seen plenty of game violations and poaching cases in that decade, but he sees a few things time and again.

"You name it, we've seen it," he said.

Wisconsin is a premier state for deer hunting. About 600,000 people gun hunt for deer each year, while 112,000 use vertical bows and 127,000 use crossbows to chase deer before and after gun season (it is also legal to use bows and crossbows during the gun season).

Wisconsin continues to hold the lead as having the most Pope and Young Club (archery) and Boone and Crockett Club (archery and firearms) trophy deer of any state.

With all those hunters afield, it's the pursuit of deer that also can bring out the worst in hunter behavior.

Some hunters will go to almost any extreme to take a bragging buck or fill the freezer with venison, and that's where Delzer and his fellow wardens come in to keep most of us honest – and a few paying the

price for violations. Delzer shared his experiences that are common throughout the state, but seem persistent in Shawano County and the Central Farmland Zone (including Waupaca and Oconto counties).

"You know when someone is cheating," he said.

Voluntary compliance is the goal, because wardens are stretched pretty thin and can't be everywhere.

Those blatant violators are most likely to get the law book thrown at them, but those who make an honest mistake and admit it might catch a break, Delzer said.

"I very much so respect that," he said.

As expected, hunting deer over bait is a frequent violation. Baiting has been illegal in Shawano County for years, and currently is banned in 62 counties, including most counties surrounding Shawano County (the only exception is Brown County). It's pretty hard to accidentall" hunt over bait.

For complete baiting information, go to <https://dnr.wisconsin.gov/topic/hunt/bait>.

The purpose of the baiting ban is to slow the spread of CWD, the always-fatal deer disease spread when deer congregate and come in contact with a contaminated deer, Delzer noted. Even if bait is removed from a hunting area, that site is considered baited up to 10 days later (this is similar to federal baiting bans for waterfowl).

Group hunting, a long-standing tradition in Wisconsin, recalls happy memories of Northwoods hunting camps and deer drives. Delzer himself enjoys hunting with family



Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources game warden Clark Delzer shows off his new 2025 Ford F-150 with twin-turbo motor outside his Shawano office. Delzer, who shares warden duties in Shawano County with Mark Schraufnagel, explained the common hunting violations he's seen during his decade of experience covering the deer hunting seasons.

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and friends on the family's farm in the Oconto Falls area, and also is an avid bowhunter.

He and other wardens see many violations related to group hunting, including improperly using someone else's deer permit or "tag" (now officially known as a harvest authorization, since it is no longer required to tag a deer).

Although group hunting (also known as party hunting) is associated with deer drives, it is legal for one hunter on stand to fill a permit for another hunter on stand, as long as they are within sight or voice contact (cell phones and two-way radios are not considered legal voice contact), Delzer said.

Both hunters must have firearms or airguns (party

or group hunting is illegal for bow and crossbow hunters) and be licensed. Hunters generally agree ahead of time whether they will accept and register a deer shot by another person in their party.

Those only driving deer are not required to possess firearms or licenses.

Blaze orange clothing has been mandated for all gun deer hunters since 1980 and is credited with a dramatic reduction in hunting accidents. Blaze pink was legalized as another color option a few years ago. Wisconsin allows camo-blaze orange and camo-blaze pink if at least 50% of the material is blaze orange or fluorescent pink. Anyone hunting any game during a firearm deer season (except waterfowl hunters) must wear at

BY THE NUMBERS

These are the most common hunting-related violations statewide in 2024 (number in parentheses occurred during the nine-day gun-deer season):

- Illegal baiting: 451 (222)
- Hunting with an improper license: 161 (39)
- Placing or possessing a loaded long gun inside a vehicle: 113 (88)
- Failure to register a harvested animal within required time frame: 106
- Hunting from a highway or within 50 feet of a roadway center: (42)
- Hunting without the required color clothing during the gun-deer season: (21)
- Take or attempt to take game without proper valid harvest authorization tag: (8)

Source: Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources



Mandated hunter education classes like this one Aug. 2 at Poygan Conservation Club are credited with a dramatic decrease in hunting accidents, along with the use of blaze orange. The 2024 gun deer season was the safest one ever, with only one non-fatal mishap, according to Joanne Haas, Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources public information officer. Six of the last 10 gun deer seasons have had no fatalities, according to Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources records.

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least 50% of a blaze color above the waist.

Although this law is well-known, many gun and bowhunters hunters don't realize they must also wear these visible colors during the two-day youth deer season, Oct. 11-12. This also applies to the statewide antlerless deer season Dec. 11-14.

It would not apply to the disabled deer hunting season prior to the youth hunt (Oct. 4-12), because the disabled hunt is on specific sites and not statewide, Delzer said.

Other firearms seasons include the gun deer hunt Nov. 22-30 and the antlerless-only Holiday Hunt on Dec. 24 through Jan. 1 in counties that approved a Holiday Hunt (Shawano, Portage, Outagamie and Oconto counties have a Holiday Hunt and extended bow season this year, while Waupaca, Langlade, Marathon and Calumet counties do not).

Other common violations Delzer sees include hunting or discharging a firearm within 50 feet of

the center of a roadway, having a loaded long gun inside a vehicle, hunting without the proper license or a tag, and failing to register a deer by 5 p.m. the day after the deer was shot.

A deer harvested without a license or proper harvest authorization is normally confiscated and given to a food pantry or someone on a list who is willing to process and eat the deer, he noted.

Scofflaws who violate game laws not only face fines and potential civil penalties (the value of the game animal taken), but also potential forfeiture of their weapons, boats and other gear.

The price of a deer license or tag seems small when weighed against this financial loss.

For a copy of the 2025-26 hunting regulations, see <https://widnr.widen.net/s/xl2s58fsbf/2025-wisconsin-hunting-regulations>.

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The statewide early goose season opened Sept. 1 in Wisconsin.
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Get ready for hunting seasons in September

The Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources reminds hunters to prepare for the opening of several hunting seasons in September.

There are several 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.

Sept. 13: cottontail rabbit (Northern Zone), deer (archery and crossbow), ruffed grouse (Zone A), squirrels (gray and fox), turkey.

Sept. 16: regular goose (Northern, Southern and Mississippi River zones).

Sept. 20: youth waterfowl, woodcock.

Sept. 27: duck (Northern Zone).

The DNR also has mobile-friendly online resources, including hunting regulations, season dates, hunting hours and more, available at <https://dnr.wisconsin.gov/topic/Hunt>.

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, as well as habitat for hunting ruffed grouse and woodcock.



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The Wisconsin black bear hunting season opened Sept. 3. CONTRIBUTED

2025 bear hunting season underway

The 2025 bear hunting season opened Sept. 3. With diligent scouting and preparation efforts, bear hunters should expect another year of quality bear hunting this fall.

This year, more than 32,000 people applied for one of the 13,110 bear licenses available. Nearly 114,000 more people opted to purchase a preference point to improve their chances of drawing a license in a future lottery. With more than 146,000 people applying for a license or purchasing a preference point, this year represents a new record high for bear hunting applications.

The 2025 bear season is open through Oct. 7, with specific regulations based on a hunter's bear management zone. Hunters must know the management zone in which they are

licensed to hunt and the specific bear hunting regulations within that zone.

Zones A, B and D – Where dogs are permitted:

- Sept. 3-9 – with the aid of dogs only.
- Sept. 10-30 – with the aid of dogs, with the aid of bait, with all other legal methods.
- Oct. 7 – with the aid of bait, with all other legal methods not using dogs.

Zones C, E and F – Where dogs are not permitted:

- Sept. 3 to Oct. 7 – with the aid of bait, with all other legal methods not using dogs.

Wisconsin has a thriving and expanding bear population estimated at around 24,000 animals. The resident bear population covers more than half the state, primarily in the forested regions of northern and central Wisconsin,

with a continued trend of slow southward expansion.

Careful and regulated public harvest of bears is the primary tool used to help keep bear numbers in balance with available habitat across the state. Hunting also plays a critical role in black bear research, the science behind bear management.

The DNR reminds hunters that all bears must be registered by 5 p.m. the day after recovery, and they must submit two upper premolar teeth to the department. These samples provide data used to monitor and ensure the health of Wisconsin's bear population into the future.

The DNR's Bear Hunting webpage (<https://dnr.wisconsin.gov/topic/hunt/bear>) provides general information about hunting bears, regulations and hunting hours.

Attention, hunters!



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Hunting high and low

Tree stands pose special safety risks for hunters

By ROSS BIELEMA
Correspondent

In the mid-1990s, I was hunting from a portable tree stand on private land in northern Illinois near Coal Valley. At quitting time, I climbed down my screw-in tree steps after lowering my bow and arrows with a haul line, as we still teach in hunter safety class.

When a boot found the next-to-last step closest to the ground, I shifted my weight and snap.

The metal step snapped where it met the tree. On my short fall, perhaps 5-6 feet, I missed the bottom step with my body and made the perfect two-point, Olympic-style gymnastics landing.

It was one of several wake-up calls on my journey to exclusively hunt from the ground.

Tree stands offer many advantages for deer hunters. They give a high vantage point, enabling hunters to see over thick foliage and spotting distant deer approaching. They sometimes allow human scent to waft up and over the deer below. Although

deer rarely looked up for danger decades ago (deer have only one tree-level predator, the human hunter), the popularity of tree stands has certainly educated some deer to look up.

Without proper safety equipment, tree stand falls can result in severe injuries or death. In fact, falls from elevated stands kill or injure far more hunters than firearms or other weapons.

Surprisingly, the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources does not keep records of tree stand falls. Fortunately, the Tree Stand Safety Awareness Foundation, an organization of hunting and tree stand products manufacturers, does keep track and offers plenty of tips on staying safe in elevated stands.

Only 14 states mandate the reporting of tree stand accidents, explained Michael Wydner, sales director with Hunter Safety Systems, one of the nation's top makers of harnesses, lifelines and other tree stand safety gear. Hunter Safety Systems is represented on the TSSA

board of directors.

Wydner said two pieces of equipment are crucial for every tree stand hunter: a full-body harness that fits your body, and a lifeline that is used from the time you first leave the ground until the time you reach your platform.

"If you do those two things, you are going to head home at the end of the hunt," Wydner said.

Of those hurt in tree stand falls, 86% fall either setting up their stands, climbing into them or climbing out of them, not actually hunting. Wisconsin state law requires that tree stands must be removed daily from state-owned public lands and reinstalled the next day when hunting. This law changed in 2017 north of state Highway 64 to allow tree stands to remain seven days prior to through seven days after any fall hunting season. The old law requiring daily removal still applies to the area south of Highway 64 (most of the state).

The free safety strap that comes with all tree stands sold in the United States meets the minimum Treestand Manufacturers Association standard, but is cheap and often confusing to use, Wydner noted. The TMA uses an outside agency for testing



Hunters are reminded to avoid placing deer stands in or near ash trees, as trees infested with emerald ash borer may unexpectedly snap or drop large branches.

WISCONSIN DNR

products.

The Wisconsin DNR hunter safety class I help with in Waupaca always starts off tree stand safety by asking an inexperienced hunter to put on the tangle of straps that comes free with a stand.

Most stare in confusion or unsuccessfully try to

put it on. The harness slips on like a jacket.

"Does price ever concern you when you're buying a parachute?" Wydner asked, noting a top-quality full-body harness may cost a bit more (\$75 to \$200, depending on pockets and features) but could save your life. His company has

more than 600 handwritten letters collected over 25 years that testify to the lives saved or protected by HSS harnesses.

"We don't make a sexy product, but it's a product that matters," Wydner said.

STANDS, CONTINUED ON PAGE 7



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STANDS, CONTINUED FROM PAGE 6

The harness must fit your weight and size, so HSS makes them from youth through 4X-5X and 50-400 pound weight limits. They are adjustable for comfort and function. Breakaway stitching slows the fall of a person to cushion the impact, but in most cases if properly set up in the tree, no stitches need to break to stop someone, he noted. Once a harness is used,

and it does break stitches, it should be replaced. There's also a lifespan for harnesses, typically five years, Wydner noted. This is especially true if they are exposed to the elements for long periods of time, as they typically are. Frequently inspect your stands for loose or missing parts, damaged straps and other wear. The lifeline, which connects to the harness via an

included metal carabiner, ensures that the hunter is protected from a fall the second he starts to climb. A Prussic knot, also included, allows the hunter to move the top of the harness strap up the lifeline, but it doesn't slide down if the person falls. The 50-foot nylon lifeline normally has a 5,000-pound weight limit and sells for about \$40. The harness-lifeline combo can be used with ladder, climbing and

other tree stands, including the newer saddles. The TSSA website, www.treestandsafety.org, is a wealth of information for tree stand hunters, including a number of videos demonstrating how to properly use harnesses, lifelines, tree saddles and more. Ross Bielema is a freelance writer from New London and owner of Wolf River Concealed Carry LLC. Contact him at Ross@wolfriverccw.com.

Use of crossbows gaining in popularity

New users need to know special safety concerns

By ROSS BIELEMA
Correspondent

Crossbows have surpassed vertical bows in popularity for hunting deer in Wisconsin and other states. Crossbows are easier to shoot accurately, offer a bit more range (up to 100 yards, vs. a maximum of about 50 yards with a vertical bow) and are ideal for young and older hunters who may not have the strength to pull a vertical bowstring (the minimum draw weight for deer hunting in Wisconsin is 30

pounds). In addition, a crossbow has virtually no recoil, unlike a centerfire rifle. Crossbows have special safety concerns that new users may not realize. While the string from a compound or recurve bow can leave a nasty strawberry mark on your arm, a crossbow string can slice off your finger. Wings, typically plastic barriers below the rail of the crossbow (where the bolt slides) keep the shooter's fingers safely below the string's path. The tremendous stored

energy of a crossbow (which may shoot faster than 500 feet per second, compared to a compound bow's 340 fps) means that the manual safety must stay on until you are ready to shoot, just as on a rifle or shotgun. Most crossbows now use a crank or other mechanical device to cock the crossbow, which may have a draw weight of 150-200 pounds. Follow the instructions in your owner's manual on how to cock and uncock your crossbow (newer models have an uncocking feature). It is best to buy from a dealer who can explain the safe way to use your crossbow in person. The National Bow-

hunter Education Foundation in Rapid City, South Dakota, offers a comprehensive online crossbow safety course. Go to www.crossbow-ed.com/national/studyGuide/Crossbow-Safety-Rules/901099_15178 for details. Hunters should also remember TAB-K: • Treat every firearm as if it were loaded. • Always point your muzzle in a safe direction. • Be sure of your target and what's in front of and beyond it. • Keep your finger off the trigger until ready to shoot. Ross Bielema is a freelance writer from New London and owner of Wolf River Concealed Carry LLC. Contact him at Ross@wolfriverccw.com.



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