Hunting at The Nature Conservancy's Preserves in Wisconsin

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Hunting Guidelines

Hunters must adhere to the following guidelines when hunting on Nature Conservancy preserves in Wisconsin.

General Guidelines for All Game Species

1. Hunting opportunities differ from preserve to preserve. See below for hunting opportunities and information on what kinds of hunting are allowed on each Conservancy property.
2. Artificial baiting, trail cameras and deer drives are not allowed.
3. Stands/Blinds:
    a. Hunters may only place one stand/blind on Conservancy land per hunter.
    b. Only temporary, non-damaging stands and ground blinds may be used.

    c. Place your name and contact info on the stand/blind.
    d. You may not put up a stand or blind more than seven days before the start of the season, and the stand/blind must be removed within seven days after the close of that season.
    e. No stands or blinds shall be placed within 50 yards of the preserve boundary or another stand or blind.
    f. The Conservancy assumes no responsibility for lost or damaged stands and blinds left unattended.
    g. All ground blinds used on the preserve during hunting season must display at least 144 square inches of solid blaze orange material visible from all directions around the blind.
4. The Conservancy makes every effort to appropriately post our boundaries. We ask that hunters do everything they can to ensure they are on TNC land and respect the property rights of adjacent landowners.
5. No fires, camping, littering (including the use of plastic flagging) or dumping of waste on TNC property.
6. No cutting, breaking or clearing of vegetation. Planting of food plots or other vegetation is not allowed.
7. Vehicles and ATVs are not permitted on Conservancy preserves except where approved for ADA usage.
8. No hunting allowed within a 100-yard radius of any inhabited dwelling.
9. Alcohol is not allowed on Conservancy property, including in our parking lots.
10. Unnecessary shooting or shooting at targets is prohibited.
11. Where Conservancy hunting permits are required, you may be accompanied by no more than one non-hunting guest while hunting on the preserves.
12. Hunting with Minors: If the hunter or persons accompanying the hunter are under 18 years of age then those individuals must comply with all current WIDNR regulations regarding youth hunting. See the WIDNR's Youth Hunting web page for details. If you are hunting at a preserve where the Conservancy requires a permit, you must obtain a separate permit and pay an additional hunting fee for a licensed minor hunter who is 14-17 years old. If the minor is not the child of the person hunting, then the Conservancy must receive a Parental Consent and Release of Liability form (available from the Conservancy) signed by the minor's parent and the hunter, prior to the minor entering the preserve.
13. Mentored Hunting Program: If an individual will be hunting under the Mentored Hunting Program, see the WIDNR's Mentored Hunting in Wisconsin web page for details on complying with this program. Mentored hunters do not need to submit a separate Conservancy permit application or hunting fee.
14. Liability Waiver: By hunting on The Nature Conservancy lands you acknowledge that hunting is inherently dangerous and that you are aware of the risks and dangers involved. By engaging in hunting as an activity, you assume all responsibility for any injury to persons or damages to property that occur in connection with your use of the Conservancy's property. As a hunter, for yourself, your heirs, successors and assigns, you hereby agree to release, indemnify, and hold the Conservancy harmless from any and all claims, liabilities, losses, damages, costs and expenses incurred in connection with your and any accompanying minor child's activities or presence on the Conservancy's property, whether or not due to any negligent acts or omissions of the Conservancy.
15. Hunters must comply with all local, state, and federal laws and ordinances governing hunting activities, including obtaining all required government licenses or permits.

Additional Hunting Guidelines for Waterfowl

Waterfowl hunting is allowed pursuant to waterway use laws (2001 Wisconsin Act 16). Hunters may only use temporary blinds and cannot cut vegetation on site or bring vegetation to the site to construct the blind. Blinds must be removed at the end of the season.

Additional Hunting Guidelines for Trapping, Small Game and Bear Hunting

Where small game and bear hunting and trapping are allowed on Conservancy preserves, we ask that you fill out and return a registration form available from TNC. Registration is optional and is used to gather data on hunting and trapping patterns.

Additional Hunting Guidelines for Bear

Where bear hunting is allowed it can be by gun or bow according to state regulations. The Nature Conservancy considers baiting to be inconsistent with State Natural Area statute (WI Stats. 23.28(3)), which prohibits activities that may be injurious or inconsistent to its natural values. However, the Conservancy has opted to go with the Wisconsin DNR's recommendation to allow the placement of supplemental food or nutrition sources on designated properties for bear hunting according to state regulations.

General Guidelines for Use of Dogs on Conservancy Preserves

1. Most of our preserves are completely closed to dogs.
2. Hunting dogs are allowed off-leash for turkey, small game and waterfowl hunting purposes, only at preserves where these hunting opportunities are allowed and according to state regulations. Off-leash hunting dogs must be kept under voice control of the owner at all times to prevent dogs from creating a nuisance to adjacent properties and residences. From April 15 to July 31, hunting dogs must be on a leash to protect ground-nesting birds.
3. Use of dogs to hunt bear is allowed per state regulation only at preserves where these hunting opportunities are allowed. Currently most Wisconsin TNC preserves where bear hunting is allowed are in Zone C, where the use of dogs is prohibited. See the WIDNR's bear hunting regulations for additional information and a map of the bear zones.

Hunting Opportunities at Specific TNC Preserves

Learn what kinds of hunting are available and whether or not a permit is required.

Baraboo Hills

The Baraboo Hills of Sauk and Columbia counties are all that remain of one of the most ancient rock outcrops in North America. A forested sanctuary underlain by durable rock called Baraboo quartzite, the Hills are an ecologically unique part of the Midwest. The oak, maple, and basswood forests of the Baraboo Hills constitute the largest block of upland forest still standing in southern Wisconsin. They provide habitat for more than 1,800 kinds of plants and animals.

Hunting Opportunities

- Most preserves open for trapping and deer, turkey, small game, and bear hunting, no TNC permits required.
- TNC permit required to hunt deer and turkey at some small isolated tracts.

Preserves with Hunting Opportunities

- Baxter's Hollow
- Freedom Woods
- Greenfield Moraines
- Hemlock Draw
- Honey Creek
- Pan Hollow
- Pine Hollow

Central Sands Region

The Nature Conservancy has two preserves in the Central Sands Region in Marquette county. Page Creek Marsh in Marquette County is a large wetland preserve that supports a rich diversity of plants, waterfowl and grassland birds. The creek winds through gently rolling farmland enhanced by remnants of native prairie and oak savanna. Summerton Bog in Marquette County is one of just a few remaining wetland areas of its kind in southern Wisconsin. It is unique because the bog contains plant varieties—sedges, in particular—that are typically northern in type. This small, protected area also contains a wide variety of wildflowers along a western section of calcareous fen. Rising above the willowy grasses is a five-acre oak island that stands in marked contrast to the low vegetation all around.

Hunting Opportunities

- Deer and turkey; no TNC permits required.

Preserves with Hunting Opportunities

- Page Creek Marsh
- Summerton Bog

Chiwaukee Prairie

Chiwaukee Prairie is part of the last unbroken stretch of prairie of its kind in the state and home to more than 400 plant species, including 26 rare plants. More than 75 species of grassland and wetland birds have been observed at Chiwaukee during the breeding season.

Hunting Opportunities

Open to all hunting and trapping allowed under DNR regulations.

- Deer - bow only
- Turkey - bow or shot
- Other birds/small game - shot

No use of rifles or other firearms discharging a single projectile, per Village of Pleasant Prairie ordinance 250-3.

NOTE: Some villages have more restrictive ordinances related to the use of firearms than the State of Wisconsin does in order to promote health and safety. Please be sure to familiarize yourself with all applicable local firearms ordinances prior to hunting on Nature Conservancy property. See the Village of Pleasant Prairie website for more information.

Door Peninsula

A slender limestone peninsula that juts out into Lake Michigan, the Door Peninsula is well-known in Wisconsin and beyond for its natural beauty and rich cultural heritage. Its rocky cliffs, sandy beaches, marshy bays, fertile wetlands, and conifer forests provide habitat for plants and animals, some of which are found nowhere else in the world. The limestone that forms the rugged backbone of the peninsula is part of the Niagara Escarpment, an impressive work of geologic artistry that covers several states and two countries.

Hunting Opportunities

- Deer; no TNC permit required.
- Fall turkey after November 1st; no TNC permit required.
- Waterfowl hunting allowed pursuant to waterway use laws (2001 Wisconsin Act 16); no TNC permit required.
- Pheasant, grouse and small game at Mink River Preserve from November 1 to February 28; no TNC permit required.
- Small game and bear hunting, trapping and unrestricted turkey hunting (per full DNR seasons) on some additional Door Peninsula lands; registration optional for small game and bear hunting and trapping.
- Some lands are in open Managed Forest Law (MFL).
- Please call the Conservancy's Sturgeon Bay office at (920) 743-8695 for more information.

Preserves with Hunting Opportunities

- Kangaroo Lake
- Mink River Estuary
- North Bay
- Shivering Sands

Lower Chippewa River State Natural Area - TNC Addition

Lower Chippewa River State Natural Area - The Nature Conservancy Addition in Buffalo County is about 161 acres of Mississippi River bluffland in the Upper Mississippi River Valley. It provides important habitat for a wide array of native plants and animals including many neo-tropical migratory birds, rare bluff-prairie plants, and a plethora of native invertebrates and mammals. It contains dry prairie, cliffs, oak openings and southern forest communities.

Hunting Opportunities

- Deer and turkey; no TNC permits required.
- Trapping, small game and bear hunting; registration optional.

Military Ridge Prairie Heritage Area

The Military Ridge Prairie Heritage Area is a 90,000-acre grassland landscape in Dane and Iowa counties in southwest Wisconsin. The area provides habitat for 14 rare and declining grassland bird species and contains more than 60 prairie remnants, representing one of the highest concentrations of native grasslands in the Midwest. The agricultural history of the area has helped keep the landscape much as it was when the first settlers saw it and has made it possible for plants and animals like grassland birds, which have disappeared in more developed parts of the Midwest, to survive.

Hunting Opportunities

- Deer, turkey, small game, bear and trapping; no TNC permits required; registration optional.
- Dogs are allowed off-leash for turkey and pheasant hunting during those seasons. Dogs must be on-leash the rest of the year, especially during the breeding bird season (April 15 to July 31).

Preserves with Hunting Opportunities

- Barneveld Prairie
- Thomson Memorial Prairie

Mukwonago River Watershed

A mosaic of forest, wetlands, savannas, rivers, and lakes, the Mukwonago River Watershed is a natural treasure located about 35 minutes from Milwaukee in Walworth and Waukesha counties. The Mukwonago River, also known as Crooked Creek, is one of the cleanest streams in southeastern Wisconsin and provides important habitat for rare fish and mussels. The surrounding landscape is home to a wide array of native plants and wildlife, including sandhill cranes, tree frogs, mink, red fox, butterflies and dragonflies.

Hunting Opportunities

- Deer - TNC permit required to hunt on one tract at Crooked Creek Preserve.
- Two properties, including most of Lulu Lake Preserve, are only open for deer hunting, no permit required.
- Trapping, deer, small game, turkey and bear hunting offered on most lands including all of Pickerel Lake Fen and the Newell & Ann Meyer Nature Preserve, and some tracts at Lulu Lake and Crooked Creek.
- Waterfowl hunting is allowed pursuant to waterway use laws (2001 Wisconsin Act 16). Hunters may only use temporary blinds and cannot cut vegetation on site or bring vegetation to the site to construct the blind. Blinds must be removed at the end of the season.

Preserves with Hunting Opportunities (Please download maps from our website for specific hunting opportunities at each preserve)

- Crooked Creek
- Lulu Lake Preserve
- Newell & Ann Meyer Nature Preserve
- Pickerel Lake Fen Preserve

NOTE: Some townships have more restrictive ordinances related to the use of firearms than the State of Wisconsin does in order to promote health and safety. Please be sure to familiarize yourself with all applicable local firearms ordinances prior to hunting on Nature Conservancy property. See the Town of Eagle website for more information.

Northern Wisconsin – Bass Lake, Border Lakes and Caroline Lake

Bass Lake

Bass Lake Preserve in Iron County contains a diversity of trees, including yellow and white birch, sugar and red maple, and aspen. In the swamp conifer forest rimming the lake and other water bodies, mature tamarack and black spruce trees grow along with large white pines. Wildlife such as great blue herons,

osprey and common loons is found in abundance near these wetlands. Bald eagles and black bears have also been spotted in the area.

Hunting and Fishing Opportunities

- Hunting and trapping per WIDNR seasons; no TNC permits required.
- Catch-and-release fishing using artificial lures; carry-in canoe.

Border Lakes

The Border Lakes Area is a 24,000-acre expanse of forests, wetlands, lakes, and streams along Wisconsin's northern boundary with Michigan. It is part of a much larger ecosystem that contains two major river systems, several untouched glacial lakes, and some of the highest-quality old growth northern hardwood and hemlock forests remaining in the Midwest. Border Lakes contains the headwaters of the Presque Isle and Ontonagon rivers along with more than 100 lakes connected by a complex network of high quality wetlands and streams. These waters include numerous aquatic habitats and a diverse assemblage of native fish and other wildlife.

The unique lakes on the property serve as reference lakes for what lakes in the area historically were like, we manage them to sustain naturally regulated fish populations by providing catch and release fishing while the use of artificial lures prevents unintended introductions that might impact the natural balance.

Preserves with Hunting Opportunities

- Catherine Wolter Wilderness Area
    - Hunting and trapping per WIDNR seasons; no TNC permits required.
    - Catch-and-release fishing with artificial lures only is allowed on all waters.
- Guido Rahr, Sr. Tenderfoot Forest Reserve
    - Hunting and trapping per WIDNR seasons; no TNC permits required.
    - Catch-and-release fishing with artificial lures is encouraged to protect Mirror and Roach lakes from introduction of invasive species.

Caroline Lake

Caroline Lake Preserve in Ashland County forms the headwaters of the Bad River. Its clean, clear water contributes to the high-water quality of the river and of the Kakagon/Bad River Sloughs—16,000 acres of wild rice, grasses, sedges, trees, streams, and open water located along the southern shore of Lake Superior. The Sloughs are the largest and healthiest full-functioning estuarine system remaining in the upper Great Lakes region.

Hunting Opportunities

- Hunting and trapping per WIDNR seasons; no TNC permits required.

Spring Green Preserve

Known as the "Wisconsin Desert," Spring Green Preserve is a place where forest meets bluff and where bluff levels off into plains and dunes. It is located in the unglaciated region of the state. The preserve harbors some of Wisconsin's rarest plant communities, including sand prairie, dry bluff prairie and black oak barrens. Due to changes in land use, all of these communities, which once covered thousands of acres across the state, have almost completely disappeared.

Hunting Opportunities

- Hunting and trapping per WIDNR seasons; no TNC permits required.

Frequently Asked Questions

Get answers to common questions about the Conservancy's hunting program in Wisconsin.

1. **Why does The Nature Conservancy allow hunting on its preserves in Wisconsin?**
   Wisconsin has a long tradition of hunting, passed on from generation to generation. It's an important part of our history, culture and economy. The Nature Conservancy is helping to safeguard this tradition by providing hunting opportunities on its lands. Hunting is an important management tool for the Conservancy. At some of our preserves, for example, white-tail deer populations have grown well beyond the ability of plant communities to withstand their browsing. We use hunting as a tool to control deer populations and reduce the damage they are causing, allowing plant communities to recover their full vigor and diversity. Public funding programs like Wisconsin's Knowles-Nelson Stewardship Program and the Managed Forest Law have been important partners in helping the Conservancy protect thousands of acres and enhance hunting opportunities in Wisconsin by opening these lands to the public.

2. **How much land has the Conservancy protected that is open to hunting?**
   Of the more than 25,000 acres that the Conservancy owns today, 97 percent have opportunities for some form of hunting including deer, turkey, pheasant and other game species. Thousands of acres of land that the Conservancy has helped protect and transferred to public and private entities are also open to the public for hunting and other recreation opportunities.

3. **How do the Conservancy's land and water conservation efforts benefit hunters?**
   With the increase in human population and fragmentation of land due to urban and suburban development, the lands available for hunting in Wisconsin are decreasing. The Conservancy's work to protect land in Wisconsin since 1960 protects the habitat that game species and other wildlife need to survive and provides places where young and old alike can enjoy hunting and other recreational activities.

4. **Does hunting negatively impact plants and animals at Conservancy preserves?**
   We have allowed deer hunting on Nature Conservancy lands since 1985 and, in that time, we have not seen any negative impacts on plants or animals. Hunting has, in fact, been a useful tool in helping us protect native vegetation by reducing overbrowsing by deer. Where we are providing new opportunities to hunt turkey and other game species, we will monitor use and watch for impacts. If there are negative impacts, we will look for ways to reduce or eliminate them.

5. **Why did The Nature Conservancy discontinue issuing hunting permits at most of our preserves in Wisconsin?**
   We had offered deer hunting via a permit system for many years at most of our preserves across the state. Currently, we no longer require the purchase of a deer permit on most of the land we own. We made this change to reduce confusion about hunting opportunities at our preserves and to encourage more consistent use of our preserves by hunters throughout the entire deer hunting season. All lands acquired with Knowles-Nelson Stewardship Program funding since

2006 are open to the public for hunting and trapping. This has resulted in a patchwork of hunting opportunities at many of our preserves, with hunting on some TNC lands governed by permits and hunting on adjacent TNC lands where no permit is required. This had been confusing to hunters who were uncertain which lands were subject to permits and which were not. While the 9-day deer gun season continues to be a popular time for hunters, there had not been as much hunting taking place during the rest of the deer hunting season. Other than a few weekends during the archery season and the opening weekend of the gun season, hunters with permits were rarely out hunting at our preserves. Because deer hunting is an important management tool for the Conservancy, we would like to encourage more consistent use of this preserve by hunters throughout the entire deer hunting season. By opening our preserves with no TNC permit required we are providing more opportunities for hunters to get out on the land, hunters who may not have had the chance in the past because they were not lucky enough to receive one of the limited number of permits available.

6. **Without a permit system, how will you ensure that your preserves don't become overcrowded with too many hunters?**
   We have allowed deer hunting on Nature Conservancy lands across Wisconsin since 1985. In most places we have not regulated access with a permit program, and we have not had a problem with overcrowding. As on state lands, hunters have naturally created separation among themselves to ensure that they have a good hunting experience.

7. **How does the Conservancy ensure that hunters have a safe experience at its preserves? What does the Conservancy do to ensure the safety of individuals who visit its preserves for uses other than hunting?**
   Where we have a permit system, we follow WIDNR guidelines of one hunter per 20 acres. Where we do not have a permit system, we rely on hunters to create enough separation among themselves to ensure a safe and enjoyable hunting experience. We post season dates for deer and turkey hunting at the entry points to our preserves so that non-hunters are aware that hunting could be taking place at the preserve. Volunteers monitor parking lots and roads near these preserves during the hunting season. For lands where TNC hunting permits are required, hunters must wear an I.D. badge at all times while hunting. To date, we have not had any safety issues related to hunting at our preserves.

8. **Is TNC land considered public or private when purchasing antlerless tags?**
   When purchasing your annual deer license from the WIDNR you will need to indicate on all antlerless tags whether you will be hunting on "Public" or "Private" land. Please be aware that for this specific purpose TNC's land is considered "Public" land since the bulk of our preserves have been acquired in whole or in part with funding from the Knowles-Nelson Stewardship Program. If you intend to utilize your antlerless tag on TNC land, be sure to mark that tag as Public.

9. **Why are some Conservancy preserves closed to hunting opportunities?**
   Not every activity is appropriate at all Conservancy preserves. We try to open our preserves as broadly as possible for public recreation and enjoyment but do limit use where it conflicts with our ability to protect native plants, animals and habitats. We also limit use where we do not have public access to the land or where the size of the property makes it too small to hunt safely.

10. **Are there volunteer opportunities for hunters/trappers at Conservancy preserves?**
    The Conservancy relies on volunteers to help manage our lands, and we have volunteer opportunities year-round. This is a great way to visit preserves and gain first-hand knowledge of the lay of the land before hunting season starts. Volunteers clear fire breaks, help cut buckthorn (a non-native tree), plant trees and assist with many other activities. If you take the required training sessions, you could become a member of our Prescribed Fire Crew. If you are interested in volunteering with The Nature Conservancy, please visit the Volunteer page of our web site.

11. **Are tree stands allowed at Conservancy preserves?**
    Temporary, non-damaging stands and ground blinds may be used on Conservancy land. Hunters should place their name and contact information on the stand/blind. Stands/blinds may not be put up more than seven days before the start of the season, and they must be removed within seven days after the close of that season. No stands or blinds shall be placed within 50 yards of the preserve boundary or another stand or blind. TNC assumes no responsibility for lost or damaged stands and blinds left unattended. All ground blinds used on the preserve during hunting season must display at least 144 square inches of solid blaze orange material visible from all directions around the blind.

12. **Is baiting allowed at Conservancy preserves?**
    TNC does not allow the placement or planting of supplemental food or nutrition sources on its preserves. This includes food plots, bait piles and salt blocks. The Nature Conservancy considers baiting to be inconsistent with State Natural Area statute (WI Stats. 23.28(3)), which prohibits activities that may be injurious or inconsistent to its natural values. However, the Conservancy has opted to go with the WIDNR's recommendation to allow the placement of supplemental food or nutrition sources on designated properties for bear hunting according to state regulations.

13. **Can I use dogs to hunt at Conservancy preserves?**
    Dogs are allowed off-leash for turkey, small game and waterfowl hunting purposes only at preserves that offer those opportunities. When dogs are off-leash, they must be kept under voice control by their owners at all times to prevent them from creating a nuisance on adjacent properties and residences. From April 15 to July 31, all dogs must be on a leash to protect ground-nesting birds. Use of dogs to hunt bear is allowed per state regulation only at preserves where these hunting opportunities are allowed. Currently most Wisconsin Conservancy preserves where bear hunting is allowed are in Zone C, where the use of dogs is prohibited. See the WIDNR's bear hunting regulations for additional information and a map of the bear zones.

14. **Isn't it unethical for a conservation organization to allow hunting on its preserves?**
    Hunters were some of the early conservationists in our state, and they continue to support habitat protection through hunting license fees and taxes on guns and ammunition. Their support benefits not only game species, but the many other plants, animals and habitats that the Conservancy is working to protect in Wisconsin.

15. **Did the Conservancy broaden hunting and trapping access on its preserves as a direct result of new rules for Knowles-Nelson Stewardship funding established by the Wisconsin DNR?**
    Yes. We would not be able to buy and protect land in Wisconsin without funding sources like the Knowles-Nelson Stewardship Program, and one of the requirements of the Stewardship

Program is that we provide hunting and trapping opportunities on land purchased with Stewardship funds.

16. **Does the Conservancy limit the number of species hunted on its preserves?**
    The number of individual animals that can be taken each season is regulated by the WIDNR and guided by their research and staff expertise. Based on past experience, we are not concerned about overharvesting of deer on our land. Where we are providing new opportunities to hunt turkey and other game species, we will monitor use and watch for impacts. If there are negative impacts, we will look for ways to reduce or eliminate them.