

## Wheelchair Whitetails - A Unique Opportunity for Persons with Disabilities: by Keith A. Pamperin

Last year during the first week of November I along with two friends from Challenge the Outdoors Inc. were invited to participate in the final bow hunt at Steve Nooyen's, Wheel Chair Whitetails in Florence County, WI....and what a fun experience it was. Tommy Namore and I, Keith Pamperin left Green Bay Thursday morning November 9<sup>th</sup> full of anticipation. Jeff Pagels and his wife Jane were to meet us in camp later that evening. The further north we traveled the snow increased making traveling and the north country beauty more interesting. The Wheelchair Whitetails property is very secluded with a long meandering entry road through stands of mature maple trees, bordered by thousands of acres of Marinette and Florence County public land.

Steve says, "Having been extraordinarily blessed by God, my wife Kristi and I have chosen to steward our God-given resources for the benefit of wheelchair-bound individuals through a program called Wheelchair Whitetails, LLC." In summary, Wheelchair Whitetails offers a three-day guided deer hunting experience to wheelchair bound hunters at no cost.

The hunts are crossbow only and occur from mid-September to mid-November on the Nooyen's 520-acre private property located @ 90 minutes north of Green Bay in Florence County, WI.

These are fair chase hunts with no fences. Hunts are conducted from wheelchair accommodating ground blinds, and transportation is provided to and from the blinds. All equipment, meals, and accommodations are provided for selected hunters and a companion at no cost.

In 2017, the inaugural year for Wheelchair Whitetails, Steve & Kristi hosted 17 hunters plus companions. Hunters arrived in camp Thursday morning, and after orientation, lunch, and some practice with the crossbows they were off to the woods. Hunters departed camp by noon on Saturday.

Every hunter saw plenty of deer, and several were successful harvesting does at the end of the season. Shots were limited to 40 yards or less to minimize non-lethal hits, and "shootable" deer are determined from year to year to maintain a healthy deer population.

After getting settled in the very comfortable accessible lodge, followed by an orientation to the land via areal maps and a few practice shots with cross bows at varying distances we were off for the evening hunt. Steve took us out to the blinds with a cool and brisk UTV ride. Tommy and I decided we would hold out for a nice buck until the final morning of the hunt. We were amazed at the number of deer we saw.

That evening Jeff and Jane Pagels joined us in camp. Jeff stated he would be thrilled to take the first good doe, saying "I don't eat antlers." Jeff did just that, taking a nice doe Friday morning.

Jeff reports "A high point of the weekend was when Steve dragged in the deer I killed to where I could touch it and we bowed our heads and gave thanks for the bounty just delivered".

After seeing plenty of deer, Friday including a few smaller bucks, Tommy and I agreed Saturday morning was "fill a tag time". We woke to a steady snow, with Steve taking Tommy to his blind, and Jeff and I to my blind. Jeff was going to be my camera man. Sure enough after about an hour in the blind, a nice doe appeared on the trail in front of me. After waking up my camera man, I took the shot. The deer made a giant leap and disappeared. After texting Steve, he came to look for the deer. Steve tracked the deer through the thick brush and heavy snow, and determined it was not vitally wounded. He said Tommy had also shot a doe, so he picked up Tommy and took the three of us back to camp. He changed into lighter clothes to track the two deer

After about four hours, a very wet and exhausted Steve returned with Tommy's doe and determined that I need to spend a little more time judging distances with a crossbow.

Tommy Namore stated "I had a great time at Wheelchair Whitetails. I was really impressed with the amount of deer we saw. Steve and Kristi put on a 5-star deer hunt. We could not have asked for better accommodations even with two wheelchairs and a mobility scooter, everything was accessible. You can really tell Steve put a lot of thought into the blinds, designing something that anyone can use no matter their individual challenge's. I personally learned a lot on the hunt, and even though it was a bow hunt, it kind of felt more like a retreat".

We are truly blessed to have people like Steve and Kristi Nooyen, that choose to inspire persons with disabilities to dream more, do more, and learn more in our great outdoors. I agree we could not have asked for more!

Applications for fall hunts open March 1 of each year. For more information, or to apply for a hunt, please check out their website:

[www.wheelchairwhitetails.org](http://www.wheelchairwhitetails.org)