http://www.ozaukeepress.com/images/111512/huntingSM.png

Hunters in Ozaukee County can use online map from DNR to find private land that's available to them

Those who live in rural areas can expect to be awakened by gunshots Saturday, Nov. 17, when the nine-day deer gun season opens in Wisconsin. It will continue through Sunday, Nov. 25.

This year, hunters will find it easier to locate private property that owners agreed to open for hunting, fishing and other recreational uses in exchange for tax incentives under the Managed Forest Law and Forest Crop Law programs.

Those who like to hike at Lions Den Gorge in the Town of Grafton and Harrington Beach State Park in the Town of Belgium should be aware that hunters are allowed on those properties during the gun and bow seasons.

Lions Den Gorge, an Ozaukee County park, will be closed during the gun season when 10 hunters are allowed on the land, but will be open with signs warning that ow hunters may be in the area through Jan. 6.

At Harrington Park, hunters with muzzleloaders and bows will be allowed to hunt in designated areas during their seasons. The muzzleloader season ends Wednesday, Dec. 5.

Hunting will not be allowed around Quarry Lake or near the Welcome Center, which are popular hiking areas, park manager Andrew Krueger said.

Maps designating hunting areas are available at the park office.

"We encourage visitors to wear bright colors, blaze orange or bright (fluorescent) green," Krueger said.

For the first time, hunters and outdoor enthusiasts can use an online map provided by the Department of Natural Resources to find private lands open to hunting, fishing, hiking,

cross-country skiing and sightseeing. Managed forest lands are open for all those uses, while forest crop land is only open for hunting and fishing.

In exchange for tax incentives, owners agree to use sustainable forest practices and open the land to the public, but until now there was no easy way for the public to know where the open land is located.

By clicking on marked areas of the online map, the owner, description of the land and number of acres open to the public are displayed, along with the DNR forester responsible for that area. Julie Peltier is the forester for Ozaukee County.

Ten owners have enrolled 234 acres in Ozaukee County in the Managed Forest Law. The Town of Belgium has the most open land, 96 acres owned by six landowners — Earl Kleckner, Audrey Schueller, RSSR Farms, Tom and Barb Dierringer Trust, Sam Arendt and Roger Schueller.

A total of 50 acres owned by Carol Huiras, Victor Pannier and the Random Lake Gun and Rod Club are in the Town of Fredonia, and 88 acres owned by Glen Jonas of Brookfield are in the Town of Cedarburg.

Peltier, who is at the Pike Lake DNR office and also serves Washington County, said she's received more than 50 requests from the two counties for more detailed information about land open for hunting.

She noted sometimes only a portion of the property is open to the public. Peltier can e-mail, fax or mail more detailed maps of the properties that show the areas open to the public.

"My advice is to be safe out there," Peltier said. "You may have a small area, say 10 acres, and could have 100 hunters out there. Just be really cautious and know your target before you shoot."

The online map was available Oct. 30 and revised Nov. 9 after complaints were received from nearby landowners whose land is not open to the public.

"We were hearing from landowners of properties not in the Managed Forest Law program concerned the map seemed to include them, too," said Robert Mather, director of the DNR Bureau of Forest Management, which developed the map.

"We worked to come up with a way to help the users better understand that not all lands in an identified location are necessarily open to the public."

The DNR warns the online map shows approximate locations. Hunters and others are advised to use a county plat map or maps provided by the landowner or the forester to ensure they do not trespass.

Hunters and other users are not required to notify landowners, but the DNR strongly recommends that they do so, particularly if the owner lives on or near the property. The owner's address, but not phone number, is listed.

Bicycles and motorized vehicles are not allowed on properties unless the owner gives permission.

Landowners cannot restrict people from using land enrolled in the two programs, but they can post signs showing access to the property.

Owners who put their property into managed forest land prior to 2005 pay 79 cents per acre in taxes and those who enrolled after 2004 pay $2.14 per acre in lieu of the average property tax of $42.50 per acre for productive forest land. If timber is harvested from the land, that is taxed by the state.

Peltier can provide more information on the forest law programs. She can be reached at (262) 670-3404 or by e-mailing julie.peltier@wisconsin.gov.

To access the mapping tool, visit www.dnrmaps.wi.gov/opfl/.