

Dueling shooting ranges draw neighbor's protest

Written by MARK JAEGER
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Town residents say steady gunfire prevents enjoyment of country life

Living in the country is anything but peaceful, at least according to Gene Weyker, who appeared before the Fredonia Town Board this month to protest the resounding gunfire coming from two neighboring shooting ranges.

Weyker told town officials he lives on Highway Y between the outdoor shooting ranges operated by the Ozaukee Fish & Game Association and the Ozaukee County Sheriff's Department.

"You've got people from all over the place coming here to shoot. It is like a war zone, like living in Afghanistan," he said.

"There are times the shooting is so bad you can't even bear to be outside. What are we supposed to do, stay inside all summer?
Having two ranges across from a subdivision is ridiculous."

Weyker said automatic weapon fire has even been heard coming from the gun club, although officials countered that the use of such firearms on the range is prohibited.

The sheriff's department has used the range since 1989 to train deputies. It is also rented to 12 other law-enforcement agencies, with departments from outside the county charged \$500 a session to use the range.

Weyker said shooting at the range starts as early as 7 a.m., but Deputy David Maglio said it is not used before 9 a.m.

Maglio said most departments send officers to the range during the work week to avoid paying overtime, so there is seldom shooting on weekends.

The privately owned gun club allows members to use its range whenever they want, but the most intense use comes during the seven weekends a year when sporting clays tournaments are held.

The conditional-use permits issued by the town allow shooting at both ranges from 9 a.m. to 10 p.m.

After hearing Weyker's complaints, Town Chairman Richard Mueller suggested the shooting-range operators find a way to police themselves or face formal restrictions from the town.

"I think you need to give the neighbors some chance to enjoy their property, or we'll have to start looking at amending the conditional use permits, and we will limit your hours," Mueller said.

Placing restrictions on the operation of the shooting ranges might not be an easy process.

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Copies of a section of the state statutes distributed during the board meeting note that outdoor shooting-range operators are immune from civil liability relating solely to noise.

The statutes specify that anyone using a shooting range in a "generally acceptable manner" between 6 a.m. and 11 p.m. cannot be ticketed for disorderly conduct simply because they are shooting.

In addition, the statutes give municipalities even less authority to regulate the use of outdoor ranges by law enforcement or armed forces personnel.

Zoning changes cannot be made to make a shooting range non-conforming if they were established before June 18, 1998.