

Outdoor Dreams Come True

Volunteers Turn Challenges into Opportunities

By Ryan Johnson



Teen skiboarders enjoy a day on the slopes. (NASA)

The chill of crisp autumn air blankets the bottomlands of the Black River, and a light frost covers the forest floor. Well-seasoned hunting clothing and a touch of buck fever is the only thing keeping two hunters warm as they hide silently in a windfall awaiting their opportunity to put some meat in the freezer.

The man holding the .270 Remington rifle is Steve Johnson, legally blind but fully tuned into the surroundings. He is assisted by his hunting mentor, Ed Mattie. Before long, twigs begin to snap in the distance and the dry autumn leaves rustle. Suddenly a whitetail deer appears in their shooting lane 20 yards

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from the windfall. Ed taps on Steve's thigh four times, the signal for a four-point buck. Steve's ears guide his rifle toward the target. Hearts are pounding. Ed watches a tiny green laser dot down range as he quietly scratches signals on Steve's thigh to guide the dot into the kill zone. Finally he signals Steve to shoot and a loud CRACK echoes through the cold air. A clean shot right to the heart.

The two hunters soon emerge from the windfall and begin following the blood trail. At first the trail is faint but it quickly leads to a thick stream of blood. Before long the two hunters find their prey lying dead only 40 yards from the shot. They exchange praise before attending to the business at hand. This is Steve's first buck.

Though Steve has been legally blind since he was 22 years old, he has continued his passion for the outdoors, and he has also helped other physically and mentally challenged people enjoy the outdoors with his involvement in



Fisherman Mike Schultz shows his catch. (NASA)



George Wilson (blind, in sunglasses) gets pointers from his hunting mentor, Jim McDowell. (Ryan Johnson)

the North American Squirrel Association (NASA). Though the "North American" part of the southwest Wisconsin organization's name is a bit of an exaggeration, its activities have grown well beyond squirrel hunting. Squirrel hunting sparked the start of the organization, so a squirrel remains its cute, furry mascot. NASA formed in 2003 as a nonprofit organization to provide opportunities for physically

and mentally challenged people, as well as the young and the elderly, to enjoy the outdoors. Organized activities range from fishing, downhill skiing, biking, golf and both large- and small-game hunting. And thanks to generous contributions, all activities for disabled participants are provided for free. Elected officers and committee chairs organize logistics, and an army of eager volunteers makes outdoor dreams come