A Wish Come True

By: Dan Gowey, Database Administrator

I'm a bear hunter and this year after an eight year wait, I drew a tag to harvest a black bear in Wisconsin. Shortly after receiving notification from the DNR, I received a letter from a lady asking me to donate my tag so that a handicapped young hunter could use it to hunt. My first thought was something like, “this lady has a lot of nerve, asking me to give away my tag after I’ve waited eight long years”.

But the more I thought about it, it just seemed like the thing to do. Arrangements were made and late in July, I was informed that Dustin Wilmer, a young man from Indiana, would be using my tag to hunt near Medford. Later that same day, Brian Nicks, the hunter that donated his time and talents for Dustin's hunt, called and invited me to come along. Brian told me that Dustin would hunt Friday and Saturday, but I had to stay until Saturday night. Brian has a barbecue large enough to cook a whole pig and Saturday night they have a big party and barbecue a whole bear! With an invitation like that, how could I refuse?

On Thursday, September 6, I drove to Medford and met Brian and Dustin. Dustin is a wonderful young man with a sharp wit and a passion to hunt and just happened to be born with no legs. Brian hunts with a pack of Plott hounds and a bunch of friends. It's more like a gathering of friends than a hunt. And it's all about the dogs rather than killing a bear.

It rained Thursday night and the morning greeted us with sprinkles and more rain. We hunted hard all day without striking a single bear; the rain had washed away all the bear scent. Brian took it very personally that he did not find a bear for Dustin. Saturday was much better! Right away the CB radios were crackling with news of baits being hit and fresh bear tracks. Early in the morning the dogs chased a nice bear across the road and Dustin got a chance to see his first bear in the wild...he was ecstatic! We had to catch the dogs because he couldn’t hunt the forest where the bear decided to take refuge.

Later that morning, the dogs treed a bear about a mile from the road. We carried Dustin to the tree so he could get a good look at the bear. The scene at the tree was chaos with the dogs jumping up on the tree and barking so loudly I wished I had brought ear plugs. This bear was very small so we decided to let him go, but Dustin was thrilled to see a bear up close and personal.

On the way back to Brian's place, a nice bear crossed the road in front of one of our trucks. The dogs were turned loose and the chase was on. About an hour later, the bear decided to take refuge in a tree to escape the pesky dogs. Dustin was again carried to the tree and found a much nicer bear, one good enough to harvest!

After a perfectly placed shot, everyone congratulated Dustin and shook his hand or gave him a high-five! When it was my turn to have my picture taken with Dustin and his bear, he wiped his eye and said, “I think I have a tear in my eye”. I told him that if he looked closely, he would see that everyone around him also had a tear in their eye!

For me, this was one awesome experience! Lots of folks thanked me for donating my tag, but I felt like I got a whole lot more from this experience than I gave! If you've been applying for a bear tag, I can say you won't regret donating it to this organization! If you have never applied for a bear tag, you should consider applying just so you can donate it!