The kids reap more benefits than just getting to go hunting. The kids come from all over the country and get to meet people in similar situations. So not only do they get to make friends, they come away with it feeling not as alone as before, O'Donoghue said.

Some of the kids come from low-income families or from families that are paying big medical expenses, so O'Donoghue always tries to line up a meat locker that will butcher bigger game to be transported home with the children. For some of the kids' families, the meat can be very important.

"And what is better than to give them venison? It is very healthy and may help feed a hungry family," O'Donoghue said.

O'Donoghue and IDNR officials are hoping to make the hunt at Sahara Woods an annual event.

"Our future goal, hopefully, with these men, is to do this every year," she said.

The hunts can have a sense of tragedy. This year, two kids scheduled to participate in the Sahara Woods hunt died after they registered. One of the guides called the hunter he was paired with to introduce himself, only to learn the child had recently died.

O'Donoghue said the men get emotional sometimes because the kids can tug at their heart strings.

But the volunteers keep coming back.