Special deer hunt for special kids taking place this weekend

BY ERIC FODOR
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ON the sports page, they might call it a threepeat.

The third annual special deer hunt for kids with terminal illnesses and severe disabilities is taking place this weekend at the Sahara Woods just north of Carrier Mills.

Twelve kids, some as far away as Alabama and North Carolina, are taking part in the event this year, according to Jim McFarland, director of the Illinois Bowhunters Society.

The Illinois Bowhunters Society have made the hunt a big part of their annual organization’s activities. Members of the society act as guides for the children on the hunt.

“Most of the volunteers belong to that society. And they are the ones who got that going (in Illinois) about three years ago,” Eric McClusky, Illinois Department of Natural Resources site manager of Sahara Woods, said.

“It started three years ago when I walked up to your booth and said, ‘why don’t you guys take one of my kids hunting,’” Brigid O’Donoghue, founder of United Special Sportsmen Alliance, said.

Now they take 12 of O’Donoghue’s children hunting. O’Donoghue travels the nation organizing hunts for children, finding volunteer guides and finding kids.

Over 1,000 outdoors wishes — hunting or fishing trips — were granted last year by her organization, O’Donoghue said. This year, she is on track for 1,200. Her organization is growing enough for her to need board members in each state.

“I didn’t know there were that many kids out there,” O’Donoghue said.

“And she treats each of these kids like her own,” McClusky said.

The program is an all-volunteer effort and nobody makes a profit, O’Donoghue said. IDNR doesn’t have a budget for their part of the program.

Williams seeks donations and volunteers but doesn’t get any tax money for the program.

The hunts are free of charge to the kids.