

OUTDOORS

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Group comes together to give young man the hunt of his dreams

Hunting enthusiasts share the experience

BY LAUREL BEAGER
Editor

A group of Borderland hunting enthusiasts came together quickly to provide a young Twin Cities man the hunt of his dreams.

After a whirlwind of phone calls and connections, Cody Felling, 20, Fridley, harvested a 200-pound chocolate bear Tuesday with the help of guides Jay and Kristi Taylor, bear permit holder Paige Christianson, Bob Christianson of Gannon Ridge Taxidermy, Kelly and Terry Blome, who own the Falls Motel, and Minnesota Conservation Officer Darrin Kittelson.

Felling, who is wheelchair bound because of muscular dystrophy, wanted to hunt a bear and through the United Special Sportsmans Alliance had planned to hunt near Grand Rapids. USSA is a non-profit national wish granting charity that specializes in sending critically ill and disabled youth and disabled veterans on the outdoor adventure of their dreams, according to its website.

He was to hunt under a permit held and donated by Paige Christianson, Bob's daughter, through the Minnesota Taxidermy Guild to a hunter signed up with USSA. Bob said this is the first year the Department of Natural Resources has allowed people to transfer a bear tag to another person. Bob's son Nicholas also donated his tag to a hunter through USSA.



CONTRIBUTED PHOTOS

Bob Christianson, Cody Felling and Jay Taylor, pose with the chocolate bear shot by Felling Tuesday. Several local people came together to allow Felling to fill a bear tag donated by Paige Christianson.

Christianson said Paige's tag was the first to be transferred that actually ended up being filled by another hunter.

Felling, who was accompanied by Marie and Bill Olson, his aunt and uncle, found that the bear tag he had was not good in Grand Rapids.

When Dean O'Brien, of the guild, found out that Felling may not be able to hunt because of the tax mix up, he contacted Bob Christianson, who mentioned the disappointment the young man must feel about the hunt to the Taylors.

"We looked at each other

and said, 'We'll take him,'" Kristi Taylor told The Journal. And the hunt of Felling's dreams began to unfold.

Felling has hunted turkey before, but always wanted to hunt bear. His eyes sparkled as the Olsons, who live with he, his brother, and his mom, discussed the bear hunt Wednesday in a hotel room donated by the Blomes.

Later, Felling suggested his next hunt would involve moose, which evoked nervous laughter from the Olsons. Marie called she and her husband city folk and said being very close to bear,

as well as hearing the yips of nearby coyotes, added to the thrill and excitement of the adventure they shared with their nephew.

Setting up for the hunt required a ground blind be built to accommodate the wheelchair and the special gun that Felling uses. The Taylors were sent a photo of the gun to help them in the set up. Instead of pulling a trigger, he draws air in through a straw. The gun mechanism also uses a camera as a scope.

Jay Taylor had shot a bear, and knew that two bears had been coming into his bait, only accessible by

foot through a locked gate.

Jay Taylor contacted Kittleson to ensure all was being done by the book and Kittleson offered to unlock the gate and allow the party to access the bait by vehicle to make it easier for Felling to get to the blind.

Felling's uncle sat with he and Taylor in the stand. When the bear came into the camera, Bill Olson said he told Felling to suck and he did, dropping the bear, which dressed out at 165 pounds.

His aunt, in a vehicle nearby, heard the gunshot and waited for a telephone call from the hunters.

"It all worked fast, but it was the perfect hunt all around," said Kristi Taylor, who was also nearby. "Everyone that was involved wanted to make the hunt successful. The smile on Cody's face when we pulled up after the bear was shot was priceless. He was so happy.... The bear was perfect, the hunt was perfect. Everything was great."

Felling's 16-year-old brother, Josiah, hunted a few weeks ago for bear, but was not successful. Muscular dystrophy has also placed him in a wheel chair. The Olson's moved in with Felling to assist Rita, Felling's single mom, when he and his brother stopped being able to walk.

Christianson said the hunt wouldn't have happened if the Taylors hadn't stepped in.

Christianson butchered the bear and with the help of his suppliers, will donate a full mount, which will be presented to Felling at the guild's spring banquet.

Christianson said USSA is a great organization."If people have people that are struggling to hunt, they should know about the alliance," he said.

He said he found out about the organization through the guild, which donates mounts to hunters sponsored by USSA. He said he expects that USSA will send a representative to the next Sportsman's Expo held annually at Covenant Church.

Christianson called meeting Felling an honor. "Cody just loves hunting," he said. "You could tell that. To top it off he shot a heck of a trophy. I've been hunting my whole life and never shot a bear that color phase."

Many hands involved in trout project

Boy Scout Troop improves access to trout stream

BY TOM KLEIN
Timberjay

Thanks to the efforts of a local Boy Scout Troop, the U.S. Forest Service and area anglers, the public now has better access to a popular trout stream.

The group gathered a few weeks ago to clear a mile-long trail to Gilmore Creek, located in the Camp 5 Township region.

U.S. Forest Service staffers Paul Balento and Mark Toot used chain saws to clear out the heaviest brush and also spent a year clearing red tape for the project.

"They first had to determine there were no endangered plants along the trail," explained Julian Brzoznowski, who helped spearhead the project.

Brzoznowski and Jim Aker operated brush cutters to help clear the path while Ted Melgeorge and Jim Eichied assisted the movement of equipment and people on four-wheelers.

The Orr Boy Scout Troop 427 arrived in the afternoon to clear the brush. The group included Scouts Olin Halverson, Hank Halverson, Scott Sanborn, Jacob Skraba and Scout leaders Steve Skraba and Shawn Halverson.

"We're always looking for a community service project," said Scoutmaster Shawn Halverson. "So when Julian called, we were happy to volunteer."

Brzoznowski is working to secure a trail building badge for the Scouts who assisted with the work.

The Gilmore Creet trail project is part an ongoing effort to revitalize trout fishing in the region.

In May, the Department of Natural Resources stocked Lost River and Fawn Creek with trout produced at a Wis-



A brook trout that was stocked earlier at Lost River. Gilmore Creek does not need to be stocked; it has a natural reproducing trout population.

consin hatchery, and previously helped remove beaver dams from area rivers.

Beaver dams slow the flow of water in the creeks and beavers also remove trees that provide shade cover for the creek and keep water from heating up.

Water temperatures of 65 degrees or below are ideal for brook trout, according to Kevin Peterson, area fisheries manager for the DNR in International Falls. "I've seen water coming out of beaver ponds that is over 80 degrees. Trout can't survive that."

Funds for the trout reclamation project came from a grant from the Lessard-Sams Outdoor Heritage Council. The council was formed to oversee the distribution of dollars generated by the Legacy Amendment. Grants range from \$5,000 to \$400,000 and require local donations, as well. Organizers were able to raise \$10,000 in local contributions to secure the grant.

Gilmore Creek already naturally produces a good trout population and didn't need to be stocked. The trail project was all volunteer, so it didn't require any funding. But Brzoznowski noted that the work qualifies as an in-

kind donation and could be used to leverage additional grant dollars in the future.

For Brzoznowski and Aker, the project recalls a return to their roots when trout fishing was more popular. But it's also an opportunity to offer visitors more diverse game-fishing opportunities.

"Walleye is king around here," noted Peterson. "It's our state fish and it gets all the glory. But there's a small but dedicated group of anglers who fish for trout. Fortunately, we have a lot of water and can provide a lot



CONTRIBUTED PHOTOS

Members of the Orr Boy Scout Troop 427 helped with the trail project as did the U.S. Forest Service and other volunteers.

of different experiences."

Meanwhile, Brzoznowski said the Gilmore Creek trail project has already paid dividends with several folks taking the trail to try their hand at trout fishing. "They've been pulling out some five- to seven-inch trout — good eating size," he said.

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