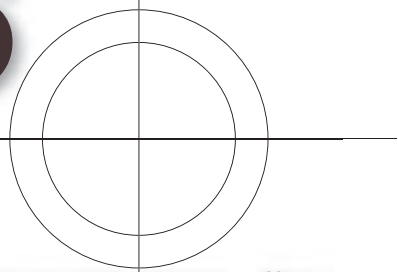


# HUNTERS WITH DISABILITIES



*Biff Williams, Spokane, Washington  
courtesy of PCBA*

*by Julie Wiest*

The Great Outdoors can be an enjoyable and therapeutic environment for people who have disabilities, but some amputees may think that outdoor sports are off limits to them. However, numerous amputees have shown otherwise. Ed Hommer and Warren Macdonald still climb mountains after their amputations, and amputees Paul Wheaton, Hugh Elliot and Jason Lefor canoe, sail and wakeboard, respectively.

In addition, amputees and people with various other physical disabilities can actively participate in hunting and shooting activities. These activities, which promote independence and confidence, can be some of the easiest physical activities to pick up after an amputation. For amputees who want to hunt or shoot, there is no “Do Not Enter” sign on the Great Outdoors – that is, unless it is in their minds.

Many states have special accommodations for hunters with disabilities. Some offer special licenses that allow them to begin hunting season early. Some allow the use of a crossbow when it is illegal for able-bodied hunters. And some set aside hunting areas that may only be used by hunters with disabilities. These areas may have smoother or wider paths, making them more wheelchair accessible, or they may allow vehicles for those who have increased mobility needs.

Most outdoor, and many indoor,



*Camron Tribolet*

firearm ranges are accessible for those who use wheelchairs, and many ranges provide instruction. Simple target practice is fun for recreation, and competitive shooting and archery are as rewarding as they are challenging. Often, shooters who have disabilities compete alongside able-bodied shooters.

Rifles, handguns, shotguns, muzzle-loading guns and bows can be adapted to suit individual needs. Devices and shooting rests can be mounted to a wheelchair or on a tripod to secure a rifle or bow in place while the hunter or shooter readies to shoot. They lessen much of the strain a heavy rifle or bow can cause on a shooter with one arm or inadequate strength. Slings and shoulder straps that fit snugly to the body can also help hunters and shooters with disabilities carry and support the heavy equipment they need to hunt. Special devices and releases can be added to triggers for those who cannot pull the trigger in the traditional manner. Even hunters and shooters with bilateral, upper-extremity amputations can learn to shoot a rifle or bow with sip and puff tubes or special mouthpieces. Ground blinds and elevated, or tree, blinds can also be made accessible to someone with a disability. Adaptive equipment can be purchased through Access to Recreation, Inc.'s free catalog that can be ordered by calling 800/634-4351 or by writing to the company at 8 Sandra Court, Newbury Park, CA 91320-4302.

Some organizations will even help with the cost of special equipment for eligible hunters and shooters or custom design devices for them. Dave Baskin, manager of NRA (National Rifle Association) Disabled Shooting Services, once designed a hunting rifle that could be operated with two prostheses for a man who had lost both arms. Some amputees have even designed their own adaptive equipment. The possibilities are endless!

Many nonprofit organizations across the nation specialize in helping hunters, shooters and archers get back into outdoor sports or into them for the first time. Here are just a few of these organizations and descriptions of

how they help hunters and shooters with disabilities.

#### **NRA Disabled Shooting Services**

has established many innovative programs to introduce hunting and shooting to people with disabilities and to guide them through education and instruction in the sports. In addition to being the primary sponsor of the United States Disabled Shooting Team, many of the organization's own programs have received worldwide recognition for their contributions to the disabled community. The NRA Rehabilitation Shooting Program, started in 1994, allows physical therapists to use shooting skills as a rehabilitation tool for post-injury patients. NRA Disabled Shooting Services also conducts seminars and workshops every year for government fish agencies, veterans groups, shooting clubs and businesses that wish to serve the disabled community. Additionally, the program supports youth summer sports camps for those with disabilities, wheelchair regional games and the NRA-Beeman Grand Prix Championship tour.

NRA Disabled Shooting Services recognizes the importance of educating and training hunting instructors, outfitters, shooting coaches and volunteers who want to increase their work with people who have disabilities. Individuals may also contact the organization for answers to specific questions and for more individualized guidance. For more information about NRA Disabled Shooting Services, contact Dave Baskin at 703/267-1495 or visit [www.nrahq.org/compete/disabled.asp](http://www.nrahq.org/compete/disabled.asp)

**Disabled Hunters of North America (DHNA)** is a nonprofit organization dedicated to helping hunters with disabilities through education and by evaluating outfitters and manufacturers and helping



*Drew McCartney*

them better their products to accommodate these hunters. This organization also helps hunters with disabilities organize hunting events and find reputable outfitters and friends. For more information, visit [www.dhna.org](http://www.dhna.org)

**Wheelin' Sportsmen NWTF** is the result of a merger between The National Wild Turkey Foundation (NWTF) and Wheelin' Sportsmen of America. NWTF started as a nonprofit organization that supports scientific wildlife management on public, private and corporate lands and the sport of turkey hunting. Wheelin' Sportsmen NWTF, along with the goals of the original organizations, is committed to providing people with disabilities opportunities to enjoy hunting, fishing, bird watching and other outdoor activities. The organization is introducing and reintroducing the beauty and excitement of the outdoors to thousands of people with disabilities nationwide. Links to state-by-state guides that include information about hunting seasons, shooting events and other programs and events for people with disabilities can be found on the organization's Web site ([www.nwtf.org/wheelin\\_sportsmen/](http://www.nwtf.org/wheelin_sportsmen/)).

**Physically Challenged Bowhunters of America, Inc. (PCBA)** is a nonprofit

organization created in 1993 and run entirely by volunteers who help people with disabilities participate in bowhunting and archery. "Bowhunting has done a lot for us, and we're trying to put something back into the sport," says Drew McCartney, president of PCBA. "If a person can bowhunt, they feel that they can do anything."

Information is the key goal of the organization, and it works to keep hunters with disabilities informed about ways they can learn to hunt, special equipment they can use, and outfitters that can help them. The organization also works closely with hospitals and rehabilitation facilities and offers special social events and hunting opportunities for people with disabilities through fundraisers and contributions from companies, organizations and individuals.

PCBA produces and distributes a quarterly newsletter, *The Good News*, which includes information about new adaptive equipment, outfitters, hunts and events, guides for disabled hunting across the country and stories about individuals involved in bowhunting. *The Incredible PCBA Story* and *Overcoming the Challenge* are videos about the organization and opportunities in bowhunting for people with disabilities. "Whether you're disabled or not, bowhunting is the best therapy in the world," McCartney says.

PCBA's Web site ([www.pcba-inc.org](http://www.pcba-inc.org)) provides state-by-state guides for hunting regulations, information about adaptive equipment and additional resources.

**Buckmasters American Deer Foundation (BADF)** is a nonprofit organization created by Buckmasters, Ltd., to help hunters with disabilities across the nation. It locates and organizes opportunities for hunters with disabilities and provides all kinds of information to them. BADF organizes disabled hunts for various species, including white-tailed deer, mule deer, black-tailed deer, elk, turkey, antelope, wild boar and various types of fowl. "Every situation is different," says David Sullivan, director of disabled services for BADF, regarding these hunts. Sometimes, outfitters help by offering discounts or making lodges accessible. Some private-property owners allow hunts on their land free of charge. BADF also offers hunting scholarships and adaptive-equipment grants to help individuals with the costs of attending the hunts or purchasing special equipment. The organization's Life Hunts program grants hunting wishes to hunters ages 21 and under who have life-threatening illnesses and disabilities. Local and state chapters raise money and work together to meet the needs of hunters with disabilities across the country. Last year, BADF held 83 hunts that included between one and 60 hunters. Other activities of the BADF include freshwater and saltwater fishing, skeet shooting, sporting clay shoots and competitive archery tournaments. For more information, visit [www.badf.org/DisabledHunters.html](http://www.badf.org/DisabledHunters.html)

## PAVING THE WAY FOR HUNTERS WITH DISABILITIES

David Sullivan is an active hunter and advocate for hunters with disabilities. When he was 13, the Alabama native lost his left leg below the knee when a car hit the motorcycle he was riding. Instead of giving up his love for hunting, however, he found therapy in the outdoor sports. Sullivan enjoys all types of hunting, but he says that he likes bowhunting best.

He founded the Alabama Handicapped Sportsmen in 1989, was the founding president of PCBA, co-founded the DOORS (Disabled Outdoor Organizations Recreation Symposium) Conference for disabled hunting and fishing groups nationwide, helped organize hunts, and founded other organizations for disabled hunting and fishing across the country. He was also instrumental in convincing legislators in Alabama to pass special laws for hunters with disabilities, such as the law that allows hunters with disabilities to use crossbows when it is illegal for able-bodied hunters.

Though he still remains a member of both the Alabama Handicapped Sportsmen and PCBA, he gave up his presidencies of the organizations in 1993 to become the full-time director



of disabled services for the BADE. He is also a member of the United Federation For Disabled Archers (UFFDA) and competed in the 1995 Amateur Shooter's Association (ASA) World Championships for competitive archery. "I feel very blessed," he says, regarding all the opportunities he has had since his amputation.

He says that many states are starting to recognize the need for special accommodations for hunters and anglers with disabilities, and he sees Alabama as a leader. Some states offer accommodations to those who use wheelchairs, and Sullivan thinks other people with disabilities should also be recognized. "Just because somebody is not wheelchair-bound doesn't mean that they don't need some help and special opportunities," he says.

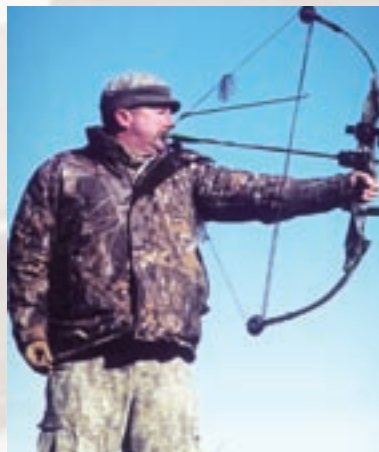
Sullivan also enjoys time spent with his family, coaching his son in Little League and photography. He writes a regular column in *Buckmasters* magazine, which is nationally published six times a year by Buckmasters, Ltd., and participates in the *Buckmasters* television series, which airs on The National Network (TNN).

## A PASSION FOR BOWHUNTING

"I don't look at myself as being disabled," Drew McCartney says. In fact, McCartney became even more active in bowhunting after he lost his right arm. "It's a passion with me," he says. And it is one that may have saved him after an electrical accident claimed his left index finger and his right arm about three inches below the elbow. After his amputations, he thought his life was over, but he started bowhunting again. "I am still human, and I can still accomplish different tasks," he says.

Kansas, his home state, allows hunters with disabilities to use crossbows, which McCartney tried; however, he soon started using a regular bow, adapted with a special mouthtab that enables him to steady the bow with his left hand and pull the string back and release it with his mouth.

Now, nothing can stop him; he hunts everything – white-tailed deer, mule



deer, elk, antelope and bear. He even has an extraordinary story about a successful mountain lion hunt. When his hunting dogs ran after the mountain lion, he chased the dogs, but the knee-deep snow provided little traction, and he slipped and broke his right arm. He got back up, treed the cat and shot it before going to the hospital for surgery on his arm.

Recently, McCartney's wife has joined him on hunts and has been very successful. Two of his three children are also active bowhunters.

McCartney is the president of Physically Challenged Bowhunters of America (PCBA) and the vice president of a local bowhunting organization. "Bowhunting is very gratifying," he says. "No matter how long I live or how hard I try, I will never be able to repay bowhunting for what it did for me."

## “LET’S SEE WHAT I CAN DO”

Camron Tribolet is a self-described “outdoors freak.” “I live for the moment,” he says. He always loved the outdoors, but when he lost his legs after being shot, he began to do even more physically than he did before. Sixteen years ago, while he was stopped at a red light, someone shot him three times in the stomach. His kidneys and liver shut down, the blood supply was cut off from his legs, and he was on a respirator. He says his parents had his casket picked out when, miraculously, his body began to function again. He survived but lost both legs below the knees to gangrene.

“Now that I have no legs, let’s see what I can do,” Tribolet says. With that philosophy in mind, he tries everything. He hunts (with a rifle, shotgun, muzzle-loading rifle or bow) all kind of animals, including antelope, mule deer, white-tailed deer, hogs and exotics, and he spends a lot of time hunting away from his home state, Indiana. “My wife is very understanding,” he says lightheartedly. He also likes to fish (mostly fly fishing), play wheelchair basketball, lift weights, and ski in Winter Park, Colorado, something he never tried until after losing his legs. He has learned to climb mountains, hills and even trees.

Tribolet is involved in Buckmasters American Deer Foundation (BADF) and volunteers his time to help other hunters with disabilities. “We let them know it’s not over,” he says. “I am proud to be a part of what BADF is doing.” ■

