

I'm a Deer Hunter

Paul Ryan

U.S. Congressman
42, Janesville, Wis.

Favorite season: Archery.
Hunting partners: His children.

Interview by Alan Clemons
Lead photo: Douglas Gorenstein
Deer hunting photo courtesy of
U.S. Rep. Paul Ryan

What is your hunting history?

I took the state hunter safety course a little before I was 12 years old because it was popular with my friends and I wanted to hunt. My father wasn't a big hunter, but some of his friends were, and (they) were the ones who took me out and were my mentors. I started with rabbits, ducks and pheasant before getting into deer hunting.

I worked mowing lawns when I was a kid to save money to buy a shotgun and bought a Browning BPS 20-gauge for pheasants. I still have it.

Tell us about your first deer.

It was early in high school. Dad died when I was in 10th grade, and one of his buddies included me in his deer camp. It's common to have multi-generational families and camps. It was up near Eau Claire, and I hunted with them through my late teens and early 20s. I got my first deer that year, when I was 16, a doe. The season opened on Saturday, and I got it Sunday morning.

You probably remember every moment, don't you?

Boy, I was nervous. I had a great old Winchester .30-30 lever-action like a lot of kids my age used, and it was a super gun. Man, it was shaking in my hands. Quartering-away shot ... I remember every aspect and detail. There was snow on the ground, so you could see



everything so clearly, too.

You love bowhunting?

Yes, I got into archery from friends who introduced me to it, and I was able to lengthen my hunting season. It was really just a natural progression from gun hunting into archery. Then I got into 3-D targets, tournaments and 300 leagues and really took a liking to all of that. Archery became a year-round thing for me.

Do you get to practice in Washington? That was a cool photo of you in *Time Magazine* with a bow in your office.

No, no target range, unfortunately. For that photo shoot, I called my friend Jay McAninch at the Archery Trade Association to borrow a Mathews from them. I hunt in Wisconsin and also a little in Oklahoma, where my in-laws have a ranch. I shoot several different Mathews bows. My most

recent is a Z7 Xtreme. I killed a 140-class (buck) that weighed 260 pounds. We have some really big deer in Wisconsin, and I try to age them on the hoof as best as I can. That Z7 shoots so fast and quietly, too.

Do you ever get to hunt?

I hunted more before we had kids, and then after that it dropped off quite a bit. I'll schedule some morning hunts on weekends when I can and then work in the afternoons if I have to or will be with the family. During the firearms season, I'll take a little more time to schedule some trips. I'll hunt with my pistol in the morning from my bow stands, and then rifle hunt in the afternoons with one of our kids. We have some two-man ladder stands, and (the children) really enjoy going with me.

I bought our daughter a Winchester Model 70 in .243 for Christmas so she can start

hunting with me. Wisconsin lowered the hunting age, and she's excited. The kids love hunting and being with me in the stand. We have a great time.

How do you balance your love of the outdoors and know its importance in the United States with fiscal responsibility for the Department of Interior and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service? Is that a tough juggling act?

It should be a user-fee finance system. I served as chairman of the Congressional Sportsmen's Caucus for four years, and the whole purpose of the caucus is to protect hunting and fishing habitat and rights. Lately, rights have been the biggest challenges — access, things like ATV access for recovering game, other issues. But with respect to resources, that's what Pitman-Robertson is all about.

Do they ever serve venison at the Capitol?

(Laughs) No, they don't. But at home I prepare my own venison and sausage. I have some big chest freezers in the basement for my pheasants, ducks, deer and other game. My family is used to eating wild game.

But they don't in D.C. That's foreign to them.



For the full interview and more photos, see deeranddeerhunting.com/imadeerhunter