

*Special Feature!*



# **DEER HUNTING ON THE APOSTLE ISLANDS**

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For the adventurous and skilled deer hunter, young in body or spirit, the Apostle Islands offer thrills, rugged conditions, and good hunting success!

These islands, lying off the tip of the Bayfield peninsula in Lake Superior, have a history that goes back to the earliest exploration days in the interior of the continent and played one of the most exciting and important parts in the early fur-trade history of the country. Throughout that entire history of approximately 300 years these islands, with the exception of Madeline, have continued to be a comparative wilderness— isolated, rugged, and unknown but to a few local people and their friends. Madeline Island because of its accessibility has always been a popular deer hunting area and invariably has a large number of hunters, but the other islands, which are in comparatively virgin condition, present a different challenge.

As a result of surveys and recommendations of the conservation department, the conservation commission at its July meeting approved a special any

deer season for these islands. This season will be concurrent with the regular one and will apply to all of the Apostles except Madeline Island which will have the same season as the mainland.

The reason for this type of season on the islands is to obtain a better harvest of the deer present. A good harvest is essential to the future welfare of the herd on most of the islands, for the deer have increased to the point where they have seriously damaged their range. In some cases, they have largely eliminated such important foods as white cedar, yew, and mountain ash. And on the majority islands they are eating more forage than is being produced.

To complicate the deer management problem, the critical winter food supply is limited to the browse produced on the area of range that deer occupy during the normal three months of yarding, when they are forced into heavy evergreen cover by the winter elements. This same winter range is used year after year. On these islands winter range is approximately 10,080 acres or 18 per

cent of the total acreage. This means that deer lose 82 per cent of the total range on the islands during the winter months.

The basic conservation problem here is to *balance the deer herd with the annual production of winter forage*; in other words, to achieve proper stocking. In order to do this it is necessary to control the population by hunting, because natural predator controls are no longer in existence. This requires a greater harvest of the annual increase of the deer herd. A deer herd will more than double itself in three years provided a good forage supply is available. Hunting bucks only, which comprise approximately 18 per cent of their herd, will not provide a sufficient harvest.

An any-deer hunting season on these islands will help control over-stocking and thus maintain a healthy range and a healthy deer herd, which in turn will eliminate the evils of heavy winter losses and lower fawn production as well as give the hunting public the best benefit of the resource in recreational opportunity.

Although we have essentially this type of problem on large areas of the mainland, we do not have the controls over hunting that are possible on the islands, as a result of their isolation and transportation limitations.

Anyone planning to hunt these islands must be prepared to rough it, as the old timers had to do all over northern Wisconsin in the old days. A good tent, stove, plenty of bedding, and food enough to last if you are stormbound for a few extra days are an absolute necessity. Furthermore, if not well planned, a hunting trip on these islands may well include danger from the elements; so *above all, leave your outboard motor and car-top boat at home.*

In the 1952 season one hunter was drowned and another group of nine spent an extra 24 hours stranded without food, shelter, or blankets, as a result of a trip to Oak Island, only two miles off the mainland, using a borrowed boat

and outboard motor. Large cabin boats with competent operators are available at Bayfield, and reservations should be made well in advance through the Bayfield Chamber of Commerce.

Although these islands look small on a state map, each island hunter should have a good compass and know how to use it. Also, a map or a penciled drawing of the island to be hunted would be desirable, as well as a good first-aid kit to take care of camp mishaps.

There has never been a hunting accident on the Apostle Islands. The men who hunt here regularly are jealous of this reputation; be sure you are not the one to ruin it.

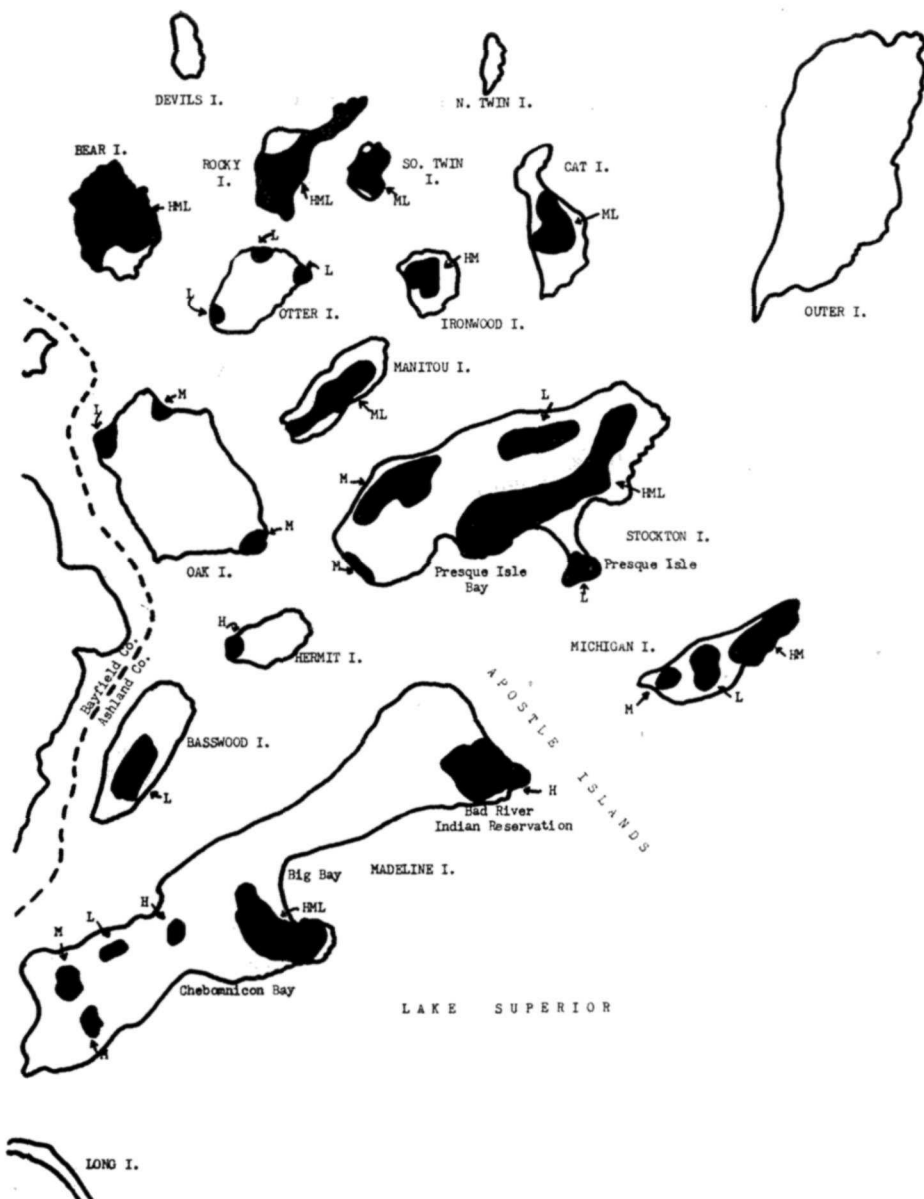
In regard to bow hunting, the islands are fast increasing in popularity with that type of recreation seeker. There is a resort on Madeline and another on Rocky Island that provide accommodations to archers. In the way of a friendly tip, a good supply of arrows should be carried, as an arrow is seldom recovered after being fired into the ground hemlock and cedar understory.

In addition to the deer population, most of the islands carry coyotes, foxes, rabbits, and squirrels. Oak Island has a few bear, but they are, of course, hard to find in November. Otter, mink, and beaver are also found on a few of the islands. Pine marten were stocked on Stockton Island during the fall of 1953 in an attempt to re-introduce the species into Wisconsin. If any of these furbearers are seen by sportsmen during future seasons, the department would appreciate receiving the information.

The following are summaries regarding the individual islands that sportsmen may find interesting and helpful.

#### **Madeline Island—22 square miles**

Transportation from Bayfield by ferry available at all hours during the deer season. Very few cabins available; hunters also taken care of by some of the island residents. Many stay in Bayfield and go back and forth by ferry each day.



Shaded areas on map show winter deer concentrations and densities from track pattern three days or more after fresh snow. Areas with joint symbols such as HML denote that deer concentrations grade from heavy, to medium to light in different parts of the shaded area. Raspberry, York, Sand and Eagle Islands off of the north shore of the Bayfield Peninsula are not shown, since they do not have deer.

Island has a large deer population. The winter range has been seriously damaged in past years—heavy winter mortality losses are certain during the next normal winter.

#### Stockton Island—16.5 square miles

Known locally as Presque Isle—the favorite of a few hunters. Owned by the Vilas Estate and posted against trespass. Permission to hunt here should

be requested of the custodian, John Frostman of Bayfield, Wisconsin.

Hunting conditions here better than on majority of the islands, because of the fairly open forest condition.

Three sheltered bays on south side of island offer good landings in ordinary weather.

The high-value foods have been eliminated by over-browsing; unless situation relieved by better deer harvesting, serious losses will occur during next normal winter.

#### **Oak Island—8 square miles**

Owned by Ashland County. No cabins available; hunters must camp out. A rugged island to hunt, with deep ravines and hills that reach an elevation of 500 feet.

Lack of cover (burned over about 10 years ago) rather than food is main limiting factor to a greater deer population.

#### **Basswood Island—3 square miles**

Most of island privately owned; a large amount of shoreline posted against trespass. A hunting camp operated by Robert Harrison of Bayfield, Wisconsin can accommodate about 25 hunters; he has a boat with which to transport hunters to and from the island.

Browsing on balsam, an indication of too many deer, common last winter. Better harvesting needed to prevent heavy losses during next normal winter.

#### **Hermit Island—1.5 square miles**

A very limited amount of winter cover present at western end of island; food conditions highly critical. High-value foods browsed out during past 2 to 3 years; herd is on decline as a result. Unless condition relieved by better harvesting, next normal winter will "take" many of the remaining deer.

#### **Michigan Island—3 square miles**

One of most inaccessible of all the islands; be prepared to sit out a 2 or 3 day storm if necessary!

In spite of dense understory of evergreen vegetation and lack of trails for organized drives, should be attractive to the rugged hunter because it holds a large population of deer.

Deer population rapidly expanding; unless brought under control, will exhaust the excellent available stands of high quality winter forage, such as ground hemlock and cedar, and will decline rapidly in the future.

Also has exceptionally heavy snowshoe rabbit population; an outstanding example of rabbit competition with deer for available browse.

#### **Manitou Island—2.5 square miles**

Deer population declining; depletion of high-value forage on winter range. Unless a better harvest is made, forage condition will continue to deteriorate, and within next few years deer population will be only a remnant.

#### **Ironwood Island—1 square mile**

Good deer population, fair hunting conditions because of present logging operations which have opened up the forest cover.

A good harvest of deer is needed to maintain the present balance.

#### **Cat Island—2.2 square miles**

Hunting conditions on this island very difficult, due to heavy understory of evergreen vegetation, which limits visibility to 25-50 feet.

Deer population is not too high now, but it is highly desirable to control the herd now while the winter range is still in good condition.

#### **Rocky Island—2 square miles**

Heaviest density of deer per square mile of all the islands.

Hunting conditions are fairly good, especially at the north end which has small openings.

Mr. Laurie Nourse of Bayfield will have accommodations this fall for 25 hunters at his resort on the island.

Outstanding example of overstocked deer range. Overbrowsing of high-value

forage plants very evident; unless the deer are adequately harvested, heavy losses will occur during the winter.

#### **South Twin Island—.75 square mile**

Heavy deer population for island's small size. Hunting conditions difficult because of the rank evergreen understory. Small size should allow coverage by organized drives.

Overstocked with deer; browse plants suffering rapid deterioration.

#### **Otter Island—2.6 square miles**

Hunting conditions difficult due to heavy understory of brush. Plenty of deer; better harvesting desirable.

#### **Bear Island—2.8 square miles**

Next to Rocky, this island carries heaviest density of deer per square mile of all the islands.

Hunting conditions better here than on most of the islands, especially on the south and central part, due to brushy openings in the overhead forest canopy.

Range is deteriorating very rapidly as the result of overstocking; only better harvesting can safeguard the future health of this herd.

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The following islands do not have deer, although tracks are sometimes

seen on a few of them, indicating that deer swim out to look the situation over: Outer, North Twin, Devils, Raspberry, York, Sand, Eagle, and Long Islands.

Judged on winter range concentrations, evaluated by flight survey on the basis of track and trail patterns which were graded as light, medium and heavy, the following islands are listed in the approximate order of deer densities per square mile of island:

- (1) Rocky Island
- (2) Bear Island
- (3) South Twin Island
- (4) Michigan Island
- (5) Ironwood Island
- (6) Madeline Island
- (7) Manitou Island
- (8) Cat Island
- (9) Hermit Island
- (10) Basswood Island
- (11) Otter Island
- (12) Oak Island

With a well-planned hunting party, a break on weather conditions, some energetic hunting, and a fair share of the proverbial hunter's luck, a hunting trip on these islands should provide ample food for many a future session around the hot-stove league. ★