

# **Over 400 Wounded Veterans Go Hunting** *60 Events Included Alligator and Turkey Hunts, Fishing, Canoeing, More*



Veterans participated in a turkey hunt at Camp Prairies in Osceola. Camp Prairie is being built for wounded veterans on the 4,000-acre tract that is part of Lake Wales Ridge State Forest.

Hundreds of wounded veterans have enjoyed unique opportunities to hunt, fish and boat in Florida's forests, ranches and waterways this year through another successful Operation Outdoor Freedom season.

On Memorial Day, Operation Outdoor Freedom celebrates its third year of events that accommodate wounded veterans in activities they love at no cost. The program, launched by Commissioner of Agriculture Adam H. Putnam in 2011 and led by the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services' Florida Forest Service, hosted more than 400 wounded veterans on hunts, fishing trips and other activities over the past year.

"It is an honor to help these men and women enjoy outdoor activities across our beautiful state," said Commissioner Putnam. "We can never repay the sacrifices they made to help protect our country, but we can try to give back in small ways that make a difference in their lives. On this Memorial Day, and every day, we are thankful for the courage and bravery of our Armed Forces."

Operation Outdoor Freedom offers wounded veterans of the U.S. Armed Forces recreational opportunities on state forests and private lands, including guided hunting events and fishing trips. During the recent hunting season, more than 400 wounded veterans participated in 60 activities, including alligator, deer and hog hunts; quail and turkey hunts; freshwater fishing and canoeing. For some of the wounded veterans who participated, it was the first opportunity to get outdoors since returning home from duty.

Since Operation Outdoor Freedom was established in 2011, the Florida Forest Service has hosted more than 700 veterans on more than a dozen state forests, private ranches and timber lands, as well as the state's coast.



Mike Jorgenson, a wounded blind veteran, caught this 11'3" alligator on a recent gator hunt.

Areas of Florida State Forests dedicated to this effort are fully equipped to accommodate the needs of wounded veterans, providing a unique opportunity for recreation and rehabilitation. All funding for the hunts is generated through private donations. Veterans participate at no charge. For more information on Operation Outdoor Freedom, go to [www.OperationOutdoorFreedom.com](http://www.OperationOutdoorFreedom.com).

*Article and pictures courtesy of the Florida Department of Agriculture, Commissioner Adam Putnam and Operation Outdoor Freedom.*

Thank you all.