

## Whitetail Woodlands Testimonial

October 2013- Wayne Pankratz and Whitetail Woodlands gets my highest recommendation!

I was referred to Wayne at Whitetail Woodlands guide service in Glidden by a mutual acquaintance that had bear hunted with him previously and said he was very reputable. I had been on two prior "guided" bear hunts in the past – one in Canada in 1998 and one in northern Wisconsin (after a 7 year application wait!) in 2005 and both were extremely disappointing. I left camp after 6 days of sitting on stand (and never seeing a bear!) with the feeling I had been "taken" and wondering what the guide did with the money I had sent for the purpose of baiting. So, needless to say I was skeptical of any guide service after being burned twice before, but when you live in southeastern Wisconsin and cannot get away up north to bait, you have no choice but to rely and depend on the integrity of another person.

So in the Fall of 2011 when I knew I and my oldest son, Zach, were close to drawing tags for the Fall 2012 bear season I asked around and got Wayne's info and hesitantly called him. From that first phone call I knew this would be a good choice for our hunt. Wayne explained in detail his service – that he only takes 2 hunters all bear season, the intense baiting he does to ensure ACTIVE baits, the practices he employs to increase his hunter's chance of success, etc. The use of a cabin that sleeps 4 was a deal sealer as I wanted to have my wife and younger son, Austin, to accompany us as well to make a family event out of this bear hunt – eliminating the need for renting a hotel room and eating at restaurants while there.

The hunt began with a "scouting" trip in early July where we stayed at the cabin for the weekend and went with Wayne to bait both mornings. Wayne first showed us photos from game cams set at the bait sites so we could see what was coming in (he starts baiting Memorial Day weekend). It was great walking to all the bait sites and seeing they had been hit. We climbed into all the stands to make sure they would be comfortable. Zach and I selected 2 stands each (primary and back-up) and from that point on Wayne would only bait those 4 stands to concentrate the bear activity there. By the end of that scouting weekend both Zach and I were highly confident we would fill our tags in 2 short months!

The day of our hunt arrived and we were in our stands by 10:00 am. At 4pm Zach had a sow and cubs come in to open the bait. He had a great time watching the little guys as the sow watched him! At around that same time I looked off to my left briefly and when I looked back at the bait there was a LARGE bear off to the left of the bait staring right at me! I had no good shot and the bear sensed something and disappeared into the thick cedar swamp. An hour or so later a bear appeared from the right side of the bait – "He's back" my mind told me. I looked quickly and yes he was longer than the 48" bait cover logs so I raised my rifle, placed the cross hairs and squeezed off the shot. The bear cart wheeled when it was hit and I immediately knew this was not the same bear I had seen earlier – but it was a legal bear and it was hit hard. The bear went about 30 yards and expired. It was a 150 pound female and though not as large as I would have liked – it was a nice, average bear and after 14 years of waiting and 2 prior hunts without even seeing a bear I was very happy. When Wayne arrived to get me we dragged it out and took him in to register and then to the butcher shop for processing. The butcher shop then took care of getting the hide to a great taxidermist Wayne recommended for mounting. I can't tell you how helpful it was that I did not have to fend for myself in handling the meat or the hide! I have a butcher shop and taxidermist I use for deer, but 250 miles away it's just not practical!

Zach did not see any other bears that first night or the next 2 as weather had moved in and the bears seemed to shut down. Wayne offered to have him come back the next week to hunt as he had no other hunters. Being a student at UW-Stevens Point, Zach could only come up to hunt Friday and Saturday evenings. The next weekend he saw a nice bear but it did not come all the way in to the bait for a clear shot. Wanting to see Zach get his bear, Wayne again offered to continue baiting if he could come back and hunt again. The next weekend was out- leaving the last weekend of the season. Zach and my wife, Becky, got in to camp Friday around noon and Wayne got him into his stand. An hour before dusk a nice bear came in to the bait. Zach went to raise his rifle but the bear caught movement and left. Just before dark the bear came back in and gave Zach a chance at redemption! He SLOWLY raised his rifle, placed the cross hairs and put a shot into the bear's chest broadside. The bear ran off and, with no death moan being heard and now dark, Wayne decided the best plan would be to ease out and come at first light and track him. Early Saturday morning Zach, Becky, Wayne and Wayne's wife Mary were back at the stand to track. 70 yards and 90 minutes later Zach could finally put his hands on his first bear. It was a 260 pound male. Wayne called up some friends to help drag and a couple hours later the bear was registered, at the butcher shop for processing and the hide would be at the taxidermist the next day!

I can honestly say this experience was more than just a "bear hunt" and Wayne and Mary much more than "guides" – they became fast friends. Knowing that my younger son, Austin, was close to having enough points to draw a tag for Fall of 2013 I asked Wayne if dogs going first would be an issue. He assured me it would not as the land his stands are on are privately owned by himself and the surrounding landowners do not allow dogs on either. I told him to pencil Austin in to hunt.

Austin did draw a kill tag and we went through the same process for him to ensure his success. Wayne had photos of several nice bears coming in – one estimated to be around 500 pounds and a couple others in the 300 pound range. The first night in his stand Austin had a small bear come in around 5:00 and open the crib. He watched him for some time until he wandered off. Just before dusk a couple porcupines waddled in to the bait crib to feast and as he watched them a black spot came in from the right and swatted the porky off a cover log, sending him sailing, and then began tossing the cover logs like they were twigs! He took aim and fired and watched the bear run off to the left obviously hit hard. When he looked back at the bait another bear about the same size was there! As Wayne drove in and parked the truck, Austin called out "bear down and one at the bait!" The bear at the bait scampered off as Wayne approached the stand, now in darkness. Austin descended and they could hear the wounded bear growling and snarling about 50 -60 yards away. The decision was made to return at first light to track him. The next morning Austin, Wayne, Mary, Becky and I returned and searched for about 30 minutes finding the bear piled up about 50 yards from the bait site. Now Austin also had his first bear! The male weighed in at 250 pounds but had no fat on him and his head was very large. We dragged him out and we were off to the cabin for photos and then to the registration station and butcher shop for processing. They would handle getting the hide to Gary Thimm for mounting.

I have nothing but the highest recommendation for Wayne and Mary at Whitetail Woodlands. Everything, from the accommodations, Wayne's expertise and post-kill contacts, to the camaraderie shared was far above all of my expectations when I made that first phone call. My only disappointment is that we will have to wait another 6 or 7 years to do it again!

Jeff Walters and Family – Fond du Lac, WI