

JIM SERVI

Wisconsin's Dispersed Camping

Disappear into the middle of nowhere

Stars shine so bright that it nearly hurts your eyes despite the fact that it is pitch-black outside. With no one around for miles, the only sound you hear is the trickle of a nearby stream and the occasional owl call echoing through the trees. Images like these often conjure up thoughts of an out West or Alaskan adventure. However, there are plenty of opportunities right here in Wisconsin and the Upper Peninsula of Michigan to disappear into the woods for some backcountry camping, hunting and fishing.

There is no better location in Wisconsin than the Chequamegon-Nicolet National Forest in the northern part of the state. Over one million acres of wild forest make up the Chequamegon with lakes and streams around every corner. Dispersed camping is what it's referred to here in Wisconsin, and you don't even need a permit. Recent easing of regulations for deer transportation and registration, including quartering in the field and phone/online registration has created a perfect opportunity for backwoods hunters. For those adventurous souls, what better opportunity to take advantage?

Hilary Markin, Chequamegon-Nicolet National Forest Public Affairs Officer, recommends that "People that want to participate in dispersed camping call the local offices before proceeding because they can point you in the right direction. Plus, they can update you on storm closures, es-

pecially this year, and make sure the area is open. It's best to narrow down what experience you're after since there are so many opportunities out there."

Trout fishing, mountain bike riding, fishing remote lakes, hiking, grouse hunting, deer hunting, snow-shoeing ... the list goes on and on, and there are certain places that are better than others. The local offices can provide you the best places based on the experience you are seeking.

- Chequamegon-Nicolet National Forest Headquarters: 715.362.1300
- Lakewood/Laona Ranger District: 715.276.6333
- Park Falls/Medford Ranger District: 715.762.2461
- Eagle River/Florence Ranger District: 715.479.2827
- Washburn Ranger District: 715.373.2667
- Great Divide Ranger District - Hayward/Glidden: 715.634.4821

Markin stressed the importance of "leave no trace." Quite simply, when you leave the area, it should look like you were never there. According to the Dispersed Camping manual, it's not just for hikers and campers, recreation vehicle (RV) enthusiasts can take advantage of this program as well. They are able to park their RVs at pull off areas on Forest Service roads. This is a perfect opportunity to set up a hunting camp

this fall or plan an adventure next summer.

The Chequamegon may be the natural place to start given the size, but it is certainly not the only opportunity to disappear into the woods. County and state forests, as well as state parks have been expanding opportunities in recent years. "Our members are exploring all over the state," says Jeff Guerard, Chapter Chair for The Wisconsin Chapter of Backcountry Hunters & Anglers. "I'm actually going after ducks in the Chequamegon this weekend."

Formed in March 2016, this group is new to Wisconsin but one to which many people passionate about the outdoors can relate. "Our focus is on preserving public lands," Guerard explained. "Our goal is to stop the transfer of federal land to state control, where the state sells it to private ownership. We've seen this a lot out West already, and now with the bill in 2013 here in Wisconsin to sell state land our plan is to lobby the Natural Resources Board not to sell."

To do that, they are currently trying to expand their membership to give their organization more clout with state politicians and ultimately protect the great places that so many of us hold dear. 

Jim Servi is a freelance writer who spends every opportunity he can in the great outdoors with his wife and three boys. Contact Jim at jimservi10@gmail.com.