

Where to Hunt

Hunter walking trails provide easy access to great grouse hunting areas

By Jay Johnson

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Another great year of ruffed grouse hunting is upon us and it's time to make plans and hit the woods.

Whether you're a first-time ruffed grouse hunter, a seasoned veteran or a family planning an active outing, finding places that offer easy access to Minnesota's most-popular game bird will be your first priority. Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (DNR) hunter walking trails are excellent place to start.

Hunter walking trails offer hundreds of miles of easily accessible hunting trails that wind their way through wildlife management areas, state forests and other public hunting lands. There are more than 450 miles of maintained trails meandering throughout the northern half of the state, and new trails are continually being created.

Many of these trails are gated, allowing foot traffic only, and offer parking lots or easy access to parking. Hunters can expect mowed routes that

may follow old logging roads, are planted with clover or pass through forest openings that attract a variety of wildlife.

"There is a lot of great ruffed grouse habitat along these trails," said Jeff Lightfoot, DNR northeast regional wildlife manager. "The trails are easy to navigate and offer excellent opportunities for the novice hunter or for families with kids just learning to hunt to see birds and enjoy the outdoors."

Finding the hunter walking trails is simple online at DNR website. The DNR website offers a hunter walking trail tool that provides information on the locations of these trails by name and the county in which they are located. Simply select a county from the tool and browse the list of the various hunting trails. You can access a map of a specific trail in two ways:

* An interactive map that allows zooming in and out of the trail area using a compass tool.

* A downloadable Adobe Acrobat Reader file that displays an aerial view of the trail and the surrounding area.

"There are more than 165 maps presently available on this website," explained Tom Engel, DNR wildlife geographic information system specialist. "New trail maps are being added continually, so folks should remember to check this website regularly for any new additions."

Hunter trail maps are also available at most DNR area wildlife offices, along with a variety of information on the area wildlife hunting or viewing opportunities and tips.

"There is no time better than this fall to pack up the hunting gear and the family and explore the forests of northern Minnesota by doing a little ruffed grouse hunting," said Ted Dick, DNR grouse coordinator.

"Ruffed grouse populations are at their peak right now. The excellent habitat and easy access you'll find on the hunter walking trails provide the perfect ingredients for a successful hunt."