



For more and more women,  
a girls weekend away means  
shooting rather than shopping.

the Outdoors, a program of the National Wild Turkey Federation that teaches women hunting, fishing and other outdoor skills. These are women who know where their meat and leather come from and don't have a problem with it.

"It's the circle of life," says Ebert, a grandmother who has hunted since she was a child and now works as a mammals consultant to the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources. "If I kill an animal, I use as much of it as I can."

Contrary to the stereotype of hunters as middle-aged men, Ebert is hardly alone among women in her fondness for working for her own meat. The National Rifle Association estimates that 2 million women in the United States hunt and 4 million participate in other shooting sports like target practice. According to Becoming an Outdoors-Woman (BOW), a national outreach program of the College of Natural Resources at the University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point, "women represent the fastest growing market for outdoor equipment and clothing."

Lisa McClain of Fort Atkinson may soon join those numbers. An avid camper

# Women in the outdoors

## Hunting and fishing – it's not just for men

By Kathryn Kingsbury

On a sunny Saturday in early May, several dozen women lined a group of picnic tables in rural Watertown for a picnic of homemade chili and desserts. Gen Ebert of Pewaukee stood in front of them, her arms stretched high above her head so everyone could see the large rectangle of cream-colored leather she was holding.

"This piece is worth a thousand dol-

lars," she explained. "Soft as butter and the palest white. You can only get leather like that by tanning it with deer brains."

A few shocked murmurs rippled through the crowd, but most of the women sat in rapt attention, chewing slowly as Ebert explained the process for working mashed brains through a freshly skinned animal hide.

It's not exactly a topic one might usually consider appropriate for mealtime conversation. But this was lunch break at an all-day workshop sponsored by Women in

and kayaker, she attended the Watertown event with a group of buddies as part of their semi-annual girls' weekend. A morning workshop on firearm safety and handling was the first time she had picked up a gun since her father tried to teach her shooting at the age of eight. That time, she was so caught off guard by the recoil that she got knocked off her feet. "I never would have picked up a gun again if I hadn't come here. It helped me get over that fear," she said after pulling down her bullet-riddled

## Be an armchair outdoors woman

target — a trophy she planned to show off to the officers at the police station where she does clerical work. “It was awesome.”

Looking at Karyl Utke’s neatly French-manicured nails, you might never guess how adept her hands are at field dressing large game. But hunting is the Tomah resident’s passion. Utke started hunting deer 20 years ago and set her sights on turkeys a decade later. She enjoyed it so much that she got a job as the Wisconsin regional coordinator for Women in the Outdoors.

Utke says her involvement in hunting grew as a way to spend quality time with her husband, but she soon found that outdoor sports double as a way to build camaraderie with other women. The reason there are fewer women hunters than male ones isn’t because women lack an affinity for hunting, she says. They’ve simply never had the opportunity to pick up those skills. That’s where her program comes in.

Women in the Outdoors started in 1998 with 1,300 members and 18 one-day events in Wisconsin. This year, national membership numbers for Women in the Outdoors are more than 42,000, and Wisconsin will be the site of 350 events.

Other outdoors programs for women are also booming. From 1991 to 2002, the number of people reached by Becoming an Outdoors-Woman weekend-long workshops multiplied exponentially from a couple hundred to 20,000.

In 1999, the NRA launched its Women on Target program, which offered 143 shooting clinics around the country in 2003. It coordinates a Women Hunters Network to help lone women find female hunting partners and leads women-only hunting trips. This year alone, it will offer

nine multi-day trips in states as far flung as Tennessee and Montana. *Women’s Outlook*, the NRA’s hunting magazine for women, reaches 50,000 subscribers.

But the outdoor life is more than shooting and angling. Charissa Sloviak of Johnson Creek decided to use her time at Women in the Outdoors to improve her camping skills. Women in the Outdoors and BOW both aim for a third to half of their classes to focus on non-game activities such as canoeing, plant identification, knot tying, campfire cooking — even

motor vehicle maintenance. “The people they get to instruct are very knowledgeable,” says Sloviak, who attended her first Women in the Outdoors workshop in 2003. “I plan to make it an annual event.”



*Kathryn Kingsbury focuses most of her hunting on edible plants and fungi, but she wouldn't mind getting good enough with a .22 rifle to bag a few squirrels.*

### Books:

*Gifts of the Wild: A Woman’s Book of Adventure.* 1998.

Maxwell, Jessica. *Femme d’Adventure: Travel Tales from Inner Montana to Outer Mongolia.* 1997.

*Two in the Wild: Tales of Adventure from Friends, Mothers, and Daughters.* 1999.

### Websites:

Arboretum at the University of Wisconsin  
<http://wiscinfo.doit.wisc.edu/arboretum/>

In a city like Madison, one doesn’t have to go far to be surrounded by nature. Check out the calendar of public events and visitor information. (No hunting or gathering and stay on the trail!)

Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources  
<http://www.dnr.state.wi.us>

Visit the DNR site for the latest on camping, hunting, fishing and outdoor recreation in Wisconsin. (Click on “outdoor recreation” on the far left of the front page.)

*Resources recommended by the Madison Public Library. Visit their website at [www.madisonpubliclibrary.org](http://www.madisonpubliclibrary.org)*