


Search and **Rescue**, Detect and **Solve**

Three stories show how conservation officers look out for everyone's safety.


Outdoors in Minnesota, day and night, men and women called conservation

officers are working to protect people and wild things.  Since

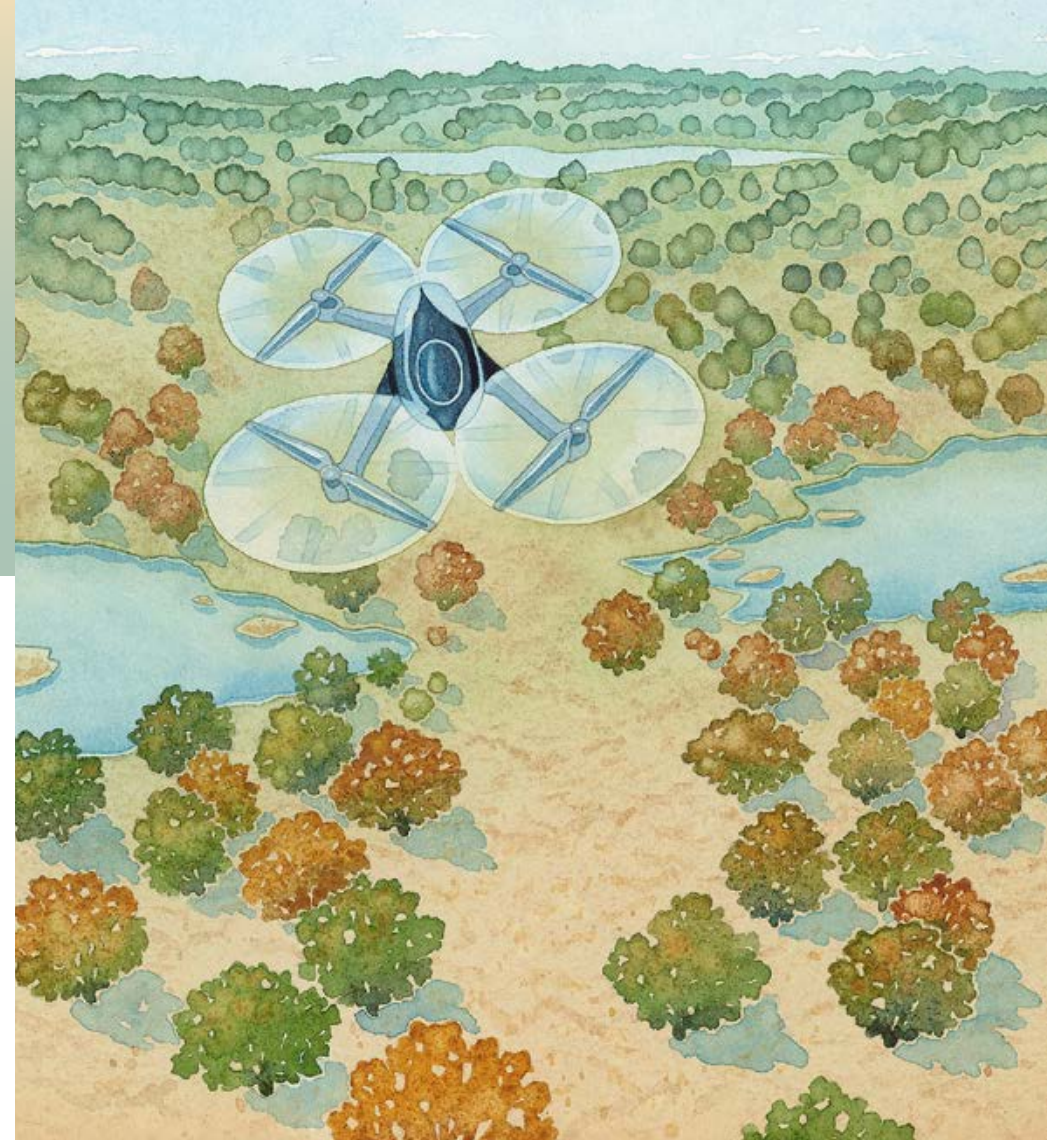
1887 these peace officers have been enforcing laws that safeguard Minnesota's

natural resources—fish,  wildlife, land, and waters that we

all share. Conservation officers, or COs, work for the Department of Natural

Resources. Among their duties, COs rescue people  and uncover

crimes. Here are three true stories of COs at work. **By Joe Albert**



Swamp **Spy**

With four propellers spinning furiously, a small aircraft called a drone hovered high above a swampy marsh. A deputy sheriff stood on shore, moving what looked like

a video-game joystick. He was remotely controlling the drone to take pictures of the land and water below.

Out in the marsh, conservation officers

Tony Salzer and Brittany Hauser heard a shotgun blast. Heading in that direction, they slogged through knee-deep water but stayed dry because they'd put on waist-high rubber waders.

Salzer's two-way radio crackled to life. "Look for the drone hovering above the swamp," the deputy's voice on the other

A man had dialed 911 to ask for help.

end told him. He turned his eyes toward the cloudy sky and saw the flying object. Salzer and Hauser were on the right track and didn't have far to go.

More than an hour earlier, a man had dialed 911 to ask for help: He and his dog were stuck in a swamp among thick cattails. Though the man tried to tell the deputy sheriff where he was, he had trouble giving directions because the swampy land had few signs or markers to follow. The drone had already searched two spots without finding the man. Salzer decided to radio for help from the Minnesota State Patrol, which dispatched a rescue helicopter.

Salzer and Hauser heard the helicopter and breathed a sigh of relief as they approached the drone and finally found the man and his dog. The man and his Brittany spaniel had been hunting small game in the 25,000-acre Carlos Avery Wildlife Man-

agement Area when they'd wandered onto a floating bog, fell through into waist-deep water, and couldn't get themselves out.

Now Salzer and Hauser were also in water up to their waists. The officers told the man he'd be OK. Then Salzer removed the shells from the hunter's shotgun so it wouldn't accidentally go off. He asked the man to take off his blaze-orange hunting vest. Then, to help the helicopter pilot find them, Salzer tied the vest to the end of the shotgun and poked it up and out of the cattails. The pilot spotted the blaze orange and radioed to Salzer that he could see the group.

From the helicopter overhead, a rescuer tossed out a long rope tied to the helicopter at one end and to a vest harness at the other. The COs strapped the hunter into the vest. The rescuer pulled him up out of the swamp and into the helicopter. When the rope came back down again, Hauser put on the rescue vest and carried the dog up into the helicopter. Finally, the rescue line pulled up Salzer with the hunter's shotgun.

Nearby, on dry land, an ambulance waited for the helicopter to land. When it did, paramedics checked the hunter for injuries. Tired but OK, the man drove home safely with his dog.

Being flown out of a swamp was a new experience for both Hauser, a new CO, and Salzer, an officer for 10 years. COs never know what they're getting into when they answer a call for help.



Candy Bar Caper

Most people were fast asleep as conservation officers Keith Bertram and Jeff Johanson decided to end their patrol and head home at 2 in the morning. They had spent the past several hours looking for people who were illegally shining bright lights to find and shoot deer. In Minnesota it's illegal to shine and hunt for deer more than two hours after sunset or anytime with a weapon in a truck or car.

Almost as soon as they started home that fall night, the officers saw a beam of light in the distance. Deciding to investigate, they turned onto a gravel road and switched off the lights of their DNR patrol truck. Slowly, gravel crunching beneath the tires, their DNR truck drew closer to a pickup truck. Someone inside was shining a light out the passenger window. Suddenly, the light and the pickup vanished. The officers quickly realized the pickup had gone over a hill.

Reaching the hilltop, Bertram and Johanson saw the pickup parked along the

road. Two people stood outside. One was shining a flashlight over a field. The other was pointing a rifle into the field. The COs turned on their truck's red emergency lights, and the two men ran.

Bertram and Johanson scrambled out of their truck, yelling to the men to stop. Bertram ran after the man with the flashlight, telling him to drop the light and put his hands in the air. Johanson chased the man with the gun, shouting at him to drop the weapon. Both men soon stopped running. The officers walked them back to the truck and ordered them to place their hands on the hood.

As Bertram patted down one man to check for weapons, he looked up and saw a third man in the driver's seat of the pickup. He shouted and told the man to put his hands in the air. Bertram and Johanson put handcuffs on the two men. Then they approached the third man, ordering him to keep his hands in the air. When the officers



told the man to step out, they discovered he had a .22-caliber rifle on the seat next to him. After taking the gun, they realized it was loaded.

The COs handcuffed the third man and started asking all three men questions about what they had been doing. The men insisted they'd been shooting coyotes and raccoons. When Bertram and Johanson looked in the bed of the pickup, they saw pools of blood and pieces of hollow hair. Bertram guessed the blood and hair came from deer.

Because the men had broken the law by shining, Bertram and Johanson arrested them. They radioed the local sheriff to come and take the men to jail. At the county jail Bertram and Johanson interviewed each man until sunrise, but no one admitted to shooting deer.

After the interviews, the COs went back to where they'd arrested the men. They searched all around for signs of dead deer but couldn't find any.

Several days later, a landowner phoned Johanson and reported finding three dead

deer in a grassy place on his land. A doe and two fawns had been shot. The deer were close to the scene of the arrests. But the COs knew they'd need evidence to link the men to the dead deer.

Combing through the grass, Bertram spotted a piece of paper and picked it up. It was a sales receipt from a gas station in St. Cloud. The receipt showed the signature of someone who had bought a Twix Peanut Butter candy bar the day before the arrests. Bertram felt a surge of adrenalin, knowing he could compare

that signature with those on the men's driver's licenses. All Minnesota driver's licenses have signatures. When Bertram looked at the licenses, it was easy for him to see the signature on one matched the signature on the candy bar receipt.

Confronted with this evidence, the man who bought the candy bar confessed to the crime: He and his friends had killed the three deer illegally.

"Without that piece of paper," Bertram said, "I don't think we would have been able to solve the case."

Follow the **Nose**

During the fall firearms deer season, conservation officers try to make sure about a half-million hunters follow the rules. They respond to citizens who ask questions about hunting laws or report seeing something possibly illegal. One day, officer Julie Siems and her K9 partner, a specially trained dog named Brady, responded to a report by someone who had seen a hunter loading a deer into a truck and unloading a shotgun on a roadside. The caller thought the hunter might have shot the deer from the road, which is illegal for safety reasons.

Two other COs were at the roadside with the hunter when Siems and Brady arrived. They wanted Brady to sniff and search for the shotgun shell used to kill the deer. The hunter said he had definitely been *away* from the road when shooting. But without snow on the ground to follow the man's tracks, the only way for officers to know the shooting place for sure was to find the spent shotgun shell. The hunter told the COs where he'd stood when firing the shot, so Siems and Brady began searching that area.

Siems kept Brady on his leash and



Brady, K9 partner

used hand signals to tell him where to go. Brady moved quickly and kept his nose to the ground. Using his well-honed sense of smell, Brady soon found the shotgun shell in tall grass. Then Brady again followed his nose and found the spot where the hunter had field-dressed the deer, cutting it open to remove its internal organs before taking it home. Brady's discoveries proved the hunter was telling the truth: He had obeyed the law and stayed away from the road when he shot the deer.

Without Brady, the COs probably wouldn't have found the evidence—the spent shotgun shell. The hunter was happy that suspicion about his hunt had ended. The caller was glad to hear the deer had been taken legally. After the successful investigation, Siems said, "Everybody left pretty happy that day." 🍋



TEACHERS RESOURCES

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