



April 14, 2026
OFFICIAL PROCEEDINGS OF THE
BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS

The Nicollet County Board of Commissioners met in special session on Tuesday, April 14, 2026, at 6:30 p.m. in the Nicollet County Board Room. Present at the meeting were Commissioners Kolars, Dranttel and Helget. Commissioners Dehen and Zins were absent. County Administrator Mandy Landkamer, County Attorney Michelle Zehnder Fischer and Sheriff Aaron Petersen were also in attendance.

Approval of Agenda

Motion by Commissioner Dranttel and seconded by Commissioner Helget to approve the agenda. Motion carried with all voting in favor.

Administration

Public Hearing for Consideration of an Ordinance Imposing Firearms Limitations for Deer Hunting in Nicollet County

County Administrator Landkamer summarized the purpose of the public hearing to gather feedback on whether to restrict deer hunting to shotguns only, following the state's repeal of the county shotgun zone for the 2026 season. The hearing is also to gather feedback if the county should adopt an ordinance allowing only shotguns, or allow rifle usage as permitted by state law.

Chair Kolars opened the public hearing. Administrator Landkamer read the submitted electronic comments into the record, summarized comments are following.

Dan Berndt

Nicollet County should follow the state law. Modern shotguns with rifled barrels and scopes can shoot just as accurately and at distances similar to rifles. Allowing access to deer hunt with rifles could make it easier for families with children to get into deer hunting. There are many recoil friendly rifle cartridges for youth and seniors vs shotgun being limited to 12, 20 and possibly 410 gauge rounds.

Trent –

Supports rifles in Nicollet County.

Kevin Ostermann -

Proven that rifles are safer than shotguns. Rifles have a higher kill vs wound rate on the deer. The reason Minnesota went to shotgun only zones way back was to improve deer herd numbers because the population was low. Hunted in Wisconsin the last years and there were no more, and even less deaths by rifles.

Andrew Thom –

Minnesota DNR hunting incident reports from 2023 and 2024, state a total of 25 firearm-related hunting incidents over those two years, with no fatalities in 2023 and only one in 2024. The shotgun zone in Minnesota dates back to 1942 as a wildlife management tool to control deer harvest rates during low population levels, not for public safety. Legislature repealed it because it's outlived its purpose.

Brian Nosbush –

Supports the use of rifles in southern Minnesota. Wisconsin data supports most incidents happen with shotgun users. Allowing rifles will not change what the poachers are doing.

Gary Buboltz –

Lives in Renville County and hunts in Nicollet County. Supports the use of rifles since it is ok with DNR and to avoid confusion.

Nathan Buboltz –

Lives in Mankato, owns land and hunts in Nicollet County that is adjacent to Renville County. Supports the use of rifles.

The following people spoke during the public hearing:

George Peichel –

Owens 80 acres of land that he hunts on and it would be an improvement to be able to hunt with a rifle. A rifle is a better tool to kill a deer. Rifles are more accurate and consistent.

Tim Knaack –

He feels that it is not fair to compare Wisconsin or Michigan or other states because Minnesota does not have the same terrain. Rifles pose a significant risk as the bullets can travel farther than shotgun slugs and shared a situation that occurred during the sighting of a rifle near some cabins. Has concerns for safety of children playing in farmyards or woods. He is concerned that youth and inexperienced hunters do not understand proper elevation sighting, that raising only a couple of inches can send a bullet miles away. His son hunts coyotes and will only shoot the first coyote due to concerns the other coyotes may not have a hill behind it to stop the bullet.

John Chamberlain –

A major concern is firearm safety. The points of deer herd management are well taken but has not seen anything on firearm safety. He recommends that the Board get the research and look at safety studies. Encourages the review of the legislative history and safety data.

Julia Aldridge –

Concerned if rifles are allowed, there will be more people shot accidentally. She shared a situation of walking on the road all dressed in red when someone on County 25 pulled out a gun, shot it over the hood of their car and shot in their direction, claiming

they did not see them. She feels it is a safety issue due to the location of her property, near horses, near hunter's locations. She is fearful for her life and not against guns, need responsible hunters. She has called the Sheriff's Office and DNR previously.

Daniel Born –

A 2007 Pennsylvania study found that modern 12 gauge shotguns can have a larger danger area than a .30-06 when fired at level terrain making shotguns more dangerous during typical hunting conditions especially when it comes to ricochets. A 2003 Wisconsin study found that between 1998-2008, only 24% of hunters used shotguns over rifles, however 42% of firearms related incidents involved shotguns indicating a disproportioned safety risk compared to rifles. Wisconsin dropped the shotgun only requirement in 2013. According to a Wisconsin DNR 2022 report, hunted related firearms incidents have dropped to the lowest levels in the state's history. Rifles are just as safe if not safer than shotguns. Facts, ballistic data and state injury statistics prove this.

Mike Stevensen –

He lives in a heavy deer concentrated area. There are a lot of houses that are close together and children in this area. There is not a need to put high powered rifles in people's hands when shot guns have been doing the job. Requested a poll be conducted of who supports rifles and who supports shotguns. Feels it was wrong of the state to force counties to make a decision.

Jack Penning –

Safety concerns because of houses along the road due to the distance that the rifle bullets can travel. He is also concerned about the local herd populations with the use of high powered, long range rifles. This county has so many people and so little timberland, does not want all of the deer killed.

Todd Becker –

Believes it is a safety issue. He can only shoot a couple of directions due to location of houses. Someone can be shooting from one property over to another property through his property. Does not support rifles for safety reasons.

Dan S. -

Summarized information from the DNR website - 14 incidents in 2024; 6 of the 14 were deer hunting incidents, 3 rifle related. Trespassers will continue to trespass. A rifle is a single shot reducing the need to shoot on the run.

Darrel Palmer –

Hunter responsibility needs to be taken seriously regardless of the type of gun in their hands. A rifle would give the hunter a better advantage for, reducing stray bullets and missed targets.

Aaron Starz –

Minnesota should not be compared to Wisconsin. All the safety concerns mentioned have to do with all weapons, not just a rifle. A rifle is more accurate due to scope and sighting. Allowing rifles in Nicollet County will bring people and keep people hunting in the county. The county would benefit from hunters staying in hotels, eating at restaurants, firearm purchases and ammo purchases. That would be money staying in the county versus handicapping the county. Nicollet County has Swan Lake.

James S. –

Believes rifles are safer with scopes, cleaner shot. Safety is on the hunter not the type of weapon. The use of rifles will not cause people to follow the hunting rules.

Gabe S. -

People that are anti-rifle are landowners that don't like hunters shooting their bucks.

Pete Otterness –

Hunts in Ridgely Township, deer population in heavily populated areas. Concerned with rifle use.

David Stoering -

Strongly oppose rifles. Concerned for farmers working in the fields during hunting season, people working in their gardens. It will be unsafe for non-farm residents for the same reasons. Rifles can shoot up to 2.5 miles, more studies on safety should be done.

Jeremy Hillesheim –

Opposes rifles.

Brad Darling –

Out of 365 days, 356 of those days he can shoot a rifle out of a stand to hunt coyotes but not for the 9 days during deer hunting season.

Rick Rathmann -

Strongly oppose rifles. It only takes one accident. Concerns of safety with distance of the shot and his grandkids being outside.

Andrew Kielen –

With a shotgun, a hunter can continue shooting, shoot 5 times, reload shoot 5 more times, that's what shotguns bring. That doesn't happen with a rifle. No one that is opposed has brought real data, it's all emotional.

Woody Wurtzberger –

Does not support rifles.

Bruce Kirby –

Concerned with poor hunter behavior. Supports hunter safety.

Dwayne Walzer –

He hunts in the valley and there are hunters to the north and south that cannot be seen, but bullets come through the trees. Opposes rifles. Concerned about safety with a young hunter and their inexperience/excitement.

Joe Pope –

Lives in a wooded area, not concerned about landowner hunting with shotguns. Concerned with rifles and an open field. Is it worth the money if someone is injured?

Pat Kielen –

Believes many hunters use guns in a safe and responsible manner. Those that are dangerous will be regardless of what they are using. Safety is on the hunter not the type of weapon. With a rifle, only one shot needed, with a shotgun, several shots.

With no further comments, Chair Kolars closed the public hearing. The next public hearing will be on April 28 at 10:00 a.m. in the County Board Room.

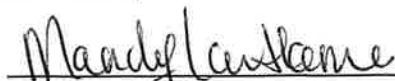
Adjourn:

The meeting adjourned at 7:42 p.m.



JACK KOLARS, CHAIR
BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS

ATTEST:



MANDY LANDKAMER,
CLERK TO THE BOARD

