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Safer driven hunts in Europe

By Carl Von Eckermann, CEO Natlink

Hunting is a deeply ingrained tradition in Europe, with seven million hunters participating in various forms of game pursuit across the continent. However, concerns about hunting safety have escalated in parts of Europe following some tragic accidents.

The good news is that hunting-related death accidents have decreased in many countries thanks to awareness-raising campaigns and safety measures pushed by the hunting community. While regulatory changes such as mandatory safety training and high-visibility gear in place across Europe, one area remains underutilised: technology.

The Nordic countries have effectively minimised hunting accidents, with Sweden, Norway, and Finland reporting significantly fewer incidents than most other nations. A key factor is the type of hunting; for example, more accidents happen during driven hunts than other hunting methods. However, driven hunts occur frequently in the Nordic countries, but with few accidents.

One key factor in this achievement has been the widespread adoption of [WeHunt](#), a digital hunting application that provides real-time tracking of all participants in a hunt. By ensuring that hunters are constantly aware of each other's locations and warning users when they are in unsafe shooting positions, WeHunt has contributed to a significant

reduction in hunting-related accidents in the Nordics. Given its demonstrated effectiveness, other countries have an opportunity to adopt WeHunt as a cost-effective and swift solution to enhance hunting safety and align its accident rates more closely with those of Northern Europe.



Safety Culture and Reforms

Several factors help explain why hunting accidents are decreasing:

Mandatory Training and Exams: Most countries require rigorous hunter education before acquiring a licence. For example, Sweden introduced a compulsory hunter's exam in 1985, and since then, accidental shooting deaths have **decreased by about 50%** ([Fler dör med legala vapen än illegala - forskning.se](#)). By enforcing safety training and exams (with practical shooting tests), these countries ensure hunters understand firearm handling, target identification, and safe shooting zones.

Strict Safety Rules: Basic rules like clearly identifying targets and respecting safe firing angles are deeply ingrained. A **"no accident" mindset** prevails around Europe: any discharge must have a safe backstop, and it's unacceptable to fire without knowing what lies beyond the target. As a result, mistaken-identity shootings (e.g. mistaking a person for game) have been nearly eliminated.

Use of High-Visibility Gear: It's standard for hunters in most countries to wear high-visibility orange clothing or vests during group hunts. This makes each person stand out in the woods, reducing the chance of being mistaken for game.

Coordinated Hunt Planning: Most hunting teams often operate in a highly organised manner. They delineate shooting zones, assign posts, and communicate plans before each hunt. This discipline ensures everyone knows where not to shoot (for example, adhering to the safe 30° firing arc rule so no one fires outside their sector).



Technology Adoption: A major difference in recent years is the widespread adoption of **digital tools like the WeHunt app in Nordic countries**. These apps have become a standard accessory on hunts, adding a new layer of safety (discussed in detail below). Nordic hunters have been quick to embrace technology to complement traditional safety measures.

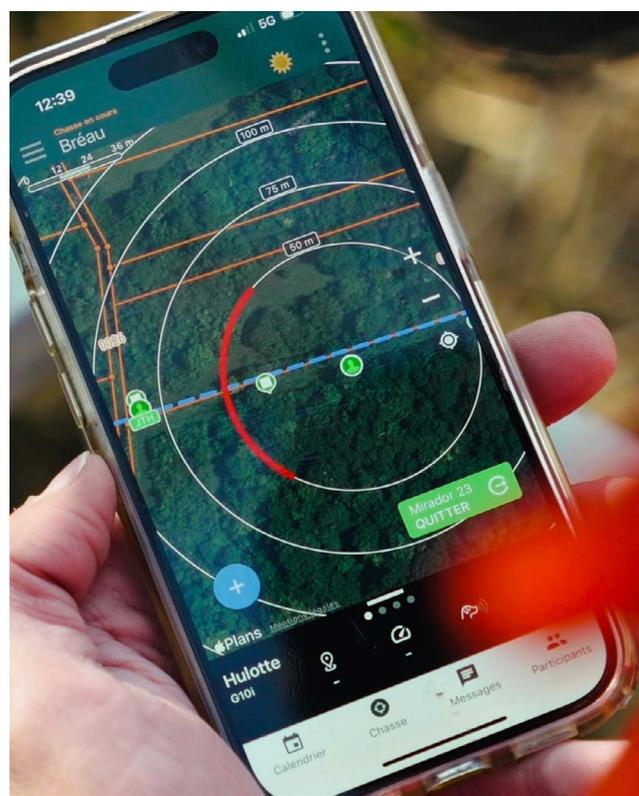
Better communication with other nature-user communities: Other communities (hikers, bikers, fishermen, mushroom pickers) are now more informed about hunted areas. This topic must be further developed in the future since some non-hunters prefer ignoring hunting signs settled beside the tracks.

WeHunt: How Real-Time Tracking Tech Reduces Accidents

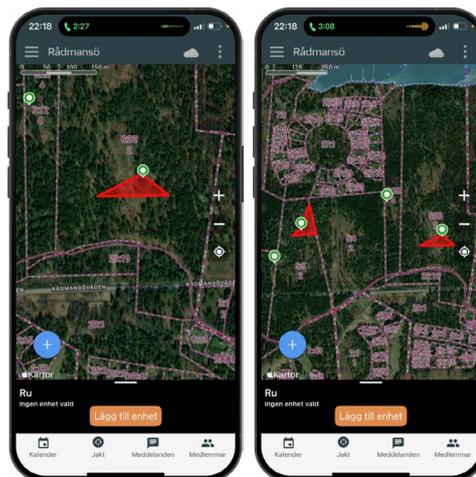
One of the most notable safety innovations in the Nordic hunting scene is WeHunt, a smartphone application that has become ubiquitous among Scandinavian hunting teams, provided by the hunting tech company Natlink ([Natlink - products](#)). WeHunt is designed to make group hunts easier and safer by offering real-time GPS tracking of all participants and dogs on a digital map ([Features - WeHunt](#)). In practice, this technology has contributed to accident reduction in several ways:

Real-Time Position Sharing:

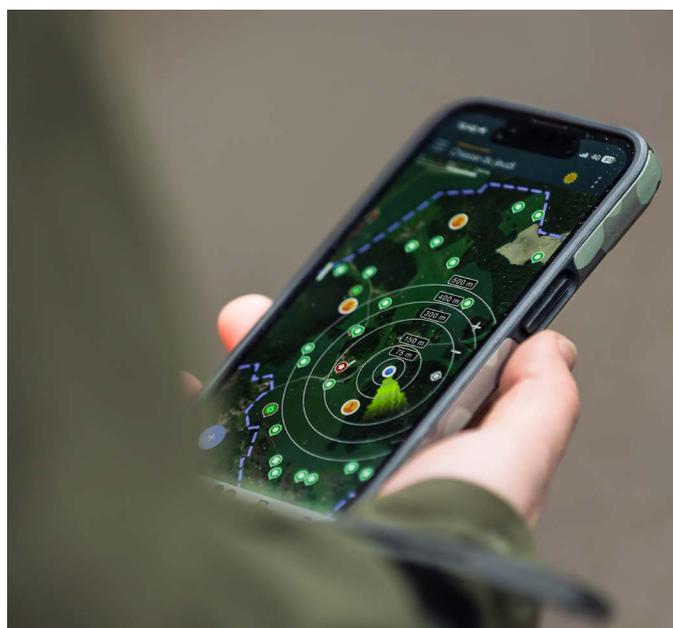
Every hunter's location is broadcast to the group via the app. This means each participant can see where their companions are in the field at all times. According to WeHunt's documentation, "knowing the positions of your companions and dogs in real-time during the hunt helps your group better define unsafe shooting directions" ([Features - WeHunt](#)). In other words, if a fellow hunter is behind a thicket in the line of fire, the app **visually alerts others to hold their shot**. This prevents the classic accident scenario of one hunter unknowingly firing toward another. French-language materials for WeHunt explicitly note that seeing everyone's location "permet... de mieux définir les angles de tir dangereux" – allows the group to better define dangerous shooting angles. ([Application WeHunt](#))



Awareness of "No-Shoot" Zones: Hunt leaders can mark forbidden areas or safe backstop zones on the digital map. Participants then have a shared understanding of where shots can be safely directed. The app effectively geofences the hunt area, so hunters avoid shooting toward neighbouring properties, roads, or any spot where people might be present. This feature addresses a key cause of accidents: bullets straying outside the intended hunt zone. With WeHunt, **shots fired in unsafe directions can be virtually eliminated** because every shooter can reference the map for a real-time safety check before pulling the trigger.



Better Coordination of Beat Hunts: In driven hunts, some hunters act as beaters who move to flush game, while others stand at posts to shoot. These dynamic situations are when confusion and accidents are most likely to occur. WeHunt mitigates this by displaying moving icons for each beater and dog. Post sitters instantly know if a beater is entering their sector, thus preventing tragic mistakes. The app even indicates when each participant has reached their assigned stand ([Features - WeHunt](#)), ensuring the hunt does not start until every hunter is in position. This level of coordination was previously only achievable with constant radio communication; now **the app offers a clear overview, reducing miscommunication**.



Communication Tools: WeHunt offers integrated chat and push-to-talk voice messaging, enabling hunters to swiftly alert each other to any danger or signal if they notice someone in a precarious position. This instant communication reduces risk even further, guaranteeing that if anyone witnesses a safety infraction (such as a hunter moving unexpectedly), they can notify the group right away. This serves as a complement to traditional hand signals or shouted warnings, providing a dependable digital communication channel.



Localized maps: WeHunt integrates local maps and map data into its system to support the local user and increase its relevance. For example, in France, WeHunt has integrated IGN public data into its system, allowing French users to access property borders which is very helpful for hunt leaders and landowners to easily define and mark "zones interdites" to improve safety and planning on the ground



The impact of these features is evidenced anecdotally by the **near-zero accident rates in countries where WeHunt is widely used**. While it's hard to quantify the app's direct effect, Nordic hunters and safety experts credit real-time tracking with virtually eliminating incidents of one hunter accidentally shooting another. A Norwegian hunting safety expert noted that accidents often occur when "one is not sure where [their] hunting companions are" (- Innafor «rød sone»)- precisely the problem that WeHunt solves by keeping everyone **constantly aware of each other's whereabouts**. By removing the guesswork, technology like this addresses the human factor in hunting accidents.

WeHunt has effectively **become the standard safety practice in the Nordics**, to the extent that many hunting parties regard it as essential as wearing orange vests. The app is available in 16 different languages and boasts hundreds of thousands of users across Sweden, Norway, Finland, and Denmark, while rapidly expanding into the rest of Europe. It even comes bundled with some Nordic dog GPS collars, including Garmin GPS collars, and is promoted by hunting associations, underscoring its deep integration into the hunting culture. Through this technology, the Nordics have shown that real-time situational awareness can make hunting significantly safer without diminishing the experience.

This movie shows how WeHunt is used in real hunting situations - <https://youtu.be/0g0B7yhiX-Q?si=kjEH79wmeaLEJGmq>

Could Other Countries Adopt WeHunt or Similar Technology?

Many countries have largely emphasised education, rules, and a new alert app, rather than mandating a tool like WeHunt. Nevertheless, the door is open for digital safety solutions to play a bigger role in elsewhere in Europe:

WeHunt is Already Available: The WeHunt application is fully translatable and can be made accessible to other countries.

Quick, Cost-Effective Implementation: Unlike developing a brand-new application from scratch, adopting an existing platform like WeHunt can be accomplished relatively quickly. It offers a **cost-effective safety upgrade** by leveraging off-the-shelf

Conclusion

technology proven in the field for years. For example, regional federations could collaborate with such app providers to implement it widely and promptly. Since WeHunt is operated by a Nordic company (Natlink) and currently serves 80% of the total Nordic hunting user base, it is proven to handle large user bases and intensive hunts. Take France, for example, and to combat tragic accidents ([Hunter, 82, accidentally shot dead by another hunter in Brittany – The Connexion](#)), this could mean **an enhancement in safety during driven hunts almost immediately**, without needing to wait years for the government's app to advance beyond public information.

Suitability for Driven Hunts: Driven big game hunts are practically tailor-made for the benefits of real-time tracking tech. These hunts often involve dozens of people spread over a forest – a coordinator (chef de battue), stationary shooters at assigned posts, and teams of beaters with dogs moving game. Communication is typically done with horn signals or walkie-talkies, but coordination can be improved. By adopting WeHunt, a hunt organizer and hunt leaders can **see all participants on one map**, ensure everyone is positioned correctly before giving the green light, and prevent anyone from inadvertently lining up a shot in an unsafe direction. Essentially, it provides the same oversight as an official on-site safety inspector – but digitally, for every hunt and from anywhere.

Interest from the Hunting Community: The idea of using hunting apps in other countries has been gaining traction, especially among hunters born after 1975. Embracing high-tech safety measures could be part of that modernisation. While some traditionalists might initially resist, seeing the success in Nordic countries could be persuasive. For example, French hunting media and forums have started discussing WeHunt, with early adopters reporting positive experiences in convenience and safety during their outings. This grassroots interest could pave the way for broader adoption.

Increasing Public Safety in and Around Hunting Areas: Hunting safety is often discussed within the context of the hunt. However, there is also a growing concern in society about public safety, specifically for ordinary people (non-hunters) who move to areas where hunting occurs, whether they are out for a walk, a run, picking mushrooms, or walking their dogs in regions where hunting is taking place. To further enhance safety in society, **WeHunt will release an additional safety function in 2025 that improves protection for anyone living in or travelling through areas where hunting activities are underway**, even if they are not connected to a hunting team or community.

In Europe, hunting accident rates differ, and although they are declining, they remain higher in some countries compared to the Nordic nations. This contrast underscores the importance of a strong safety culture and the effective use of technology. The Nordic countries have demonstrated that mandatory training, strict enforcement of safety regulations, and mandatory real-time tracking technology can virtually eliminate fatal hunting incidents. Many countries are moving in the right direction by tightening regulations and awareness-raising campaigns. In France, they are even developing a public information app; however, there is still room to advance further and more quickly.

Tools like WeHunt, which are already a *de facto* safety standard in the Nordics, provide a proven blueprint to immediately enhance hunter safety. By enabling hunters to view each other's locations and avoid dangerous shooting angles in real-time, such apps directly reduce the most serious risks of group hunts ([Application WeHunt](#)). Notably, this can be achieved at a relatively low cost and with quick adoption, as the technology is readily available, user-friendly, and already localized for the French market in terms of maps and language.

From an analytical perspective, if a country's goal is truly "zero accidents," integrating its new regulations with modern tracking and communication technology could expedite progress toward that goal. **Expert opinions** from hunting safety researchers support this approach: they emphasize that the **"human factor"** – misidentification of targets or poor coordination – is the leading cause of hunting mishaps ([Fler dör med illegala vapen än illegala - forskning.se](#)). Real-time GPS apps directly address that human factor by keeping everyone informed and coordinated ([The app for an easier, safer and hunt - Wehunt](#)) ([The app for an easier, safer and hunt - Wehunt](#)).

As hunting continues to modernize, other countries may well follow the Nordic example, where **digital safety solutions and tradition go hand in hand**. Ultimately, whether through a home-developed platform or wider use of a proven solution like WeHunt, the integration of real-time tracking technology could be the catalyst that enhances hunting safety to match the results seen in Sweden, Norway, and Finland.