



Compliments of the Hunter Education Program

Season's Greetings from the Vermont Hunter Education Program! We would like to take a moment to thank you, our wonderful volunteers, for making this program the success that it is today. Without your hard work and commitment, we would not have had such a successful year! If you didn't receive our instructor holiday letter and end of year gift, please contact our main office at 802-828-1193 and we will be sure to get it to you! Keep in mind that the Hunter Education Office will be closed for the holidays, and will re-open in January.

Insights

IHEA: Instructor Discounts, and the 2016 Conference

The International Hunter Education Association (IHEA) is the professional hunter education association affiliated with the Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies (AFWA) and the 50 state fish and hunter education programs (that's us!). IHEA brings Hunter Education Administrators, volunteers, vendors, and private citizens together to work toward our broader mission of educating safe hunters and to raise awareness and support for hunting and conservation, as well as to keep abreast of current technologies, changes, and issues facing hunters and hunter educators.

Each year, the IHEA holds a conference in order to exchange new ideas with other members. This year, the conference will be held in Vermont, hosted by the Vermont Department of Fish & Wildlife. The conference will be at the Basin Harbor Club in Vergennes, and will take place May 24-26, with a special day designed just for instructors (May 26th, 2016). The instructor day will offer hands-on training for current instructors, as well as an opportunity to learn about hunter recruitment, retention, and reactivation. The instructor day will conclude with a banquet at the Basin Harbor Club.

IHEA offers discounts to volunteer instructors through their partnerships with many industry manufacturers. To obtain discount information, simply visit their website:

<http://www.ihea.com/instructors/special-offers-for-instructors>

When asked for it, enter the password: gohunt

You Did WHAT in 2015!?

The following is an approximate for class and instructor totals in 2015. These numbers are not final, as we had some class results trickle in after we ran the numbers and compiled the report, but it gives you a good idea of how our program did this year. Overall, our bowhunter graduate numbers are up (a steady increase the past few years), and we have also seen an increase in trapper education numbers. Our hunter education graduate numbers have stayed just about the same.

Students Certified in Hunter Education Courses	Students Certified in Bowhunter Education Courses	Students Certified in Trapper Education Courses	Total Students in All Class Types	Average Student Age
Traditional: 817 Homestudy: 1,170 Combo: 823	Bow: 739 Combo: 823	289	3,838	21 years old

Average Volunteer Hours per Instructor	Total Number of Volunteer Instructor Hours Recorded	Number of Unique Active Instructors (including non-certified volunteers)	Total Number of Classes Taught (all disciplines)
27.4	11,619	417	177

Thank you to our instructors for another great year for hunter education! We appreciate the time and effort you put into teaching and preparing for courses! We know that 2017 will be even better!

New Contact Information for State Employees

Over the summer, the State of Vermont announced new contact information would be in effect for all employees. All employee e-mail addresses now end in [@Vermont.gov](mailto:)

Here is the updated contact information for us in the Hunter Education Program. Please update your records:

Chris Saunders

Hunter Education Program Coordinator

E-mail: Chris.Saunders@Vermont.gov

Cell: 802-343-5487

Address: 1 National Life Drive, Davis 2, Montpelier, VT 05620

John Pellegrini

Training Coordinator

E-mail: John.Pellegrini@Vermont.gov

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E-mail: Daneil.Pieterse@Vermont.gov

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Hunter Education Instructor Training Courses Offered

The Vermont Fish & Wildlife Department is offering several New Instructor Training Courses for people interested in volunteering to teach Hunter Education, Trapper Education, or Bowhunter Education courses in Vermont.

The courses will take place January 10 in St. Johnsbury, Vt., February 21 in Berlin, Vt., and March 12 in Castleton, Vt.

Policies and procedures, field techniques, and teaching methods will all be covered in order to give instructors the tools to teach future Vermont hunters how to have a safe and enjoyable experience.

“The skills and ethics that our instructors impart to their students will serve them for a lifetime,” said Nicole Meier with Vermont Fish & Wildlife’s hunter education program. “There is no better way for a hunter to give back to the outdoors than by instructing the next generation of hunters.”

All applicants who pass the training are required to pass a background check with a warden and shadow a Chief Instructor before they can teach on their own. Upon completion, they will then receive their full State of Vermont Hunter Education Instructor Certification.

“Our hunter education instructors are all volunteers, donating their time to pass on a cherished Vermont tradition,” said Meier. “The hours our instructors put in will leverage federal dollars that allow the Hunter Education Program to function.”

Those planning to attend should sign up online at www.tinyurl.com/VTNIT2016 or call 802-828-1193 at least one week prior to the course date.



Photo courtesy of Tom Rogers, VTFWD

Vermont's Free Ice Fishing Day is January 30

Ice Fishing Festival to be Held at Lake Elmore State Park in Celebration

Vermont's third annual Free Ice Fishing Day is January 30, 2016. To celebrate, the Vermont Fish & Wildlife Department is holding an Ice Fishing Festival at Lake Elmore State Park in central Vermont.

The festival will be held from 11 a.m. to 3 p.m. The event is free and families with kids are encouraged to attend.

Fish & Wildlife Department staff, as well as instructors from Vermont's Let's Go Fishing Program, will be on-hand to teach ice fishing basics. These include knot tying, baiting and using an ice fishing rod, and most importantly, how to stay warm on the ice. They'll also discuss fishing regulations and go over fish identification.

Department staff will operate a fish fry station to cook up participants' catch, and there will also be other refreshments on hand including plenty of hot cocoa. There will be several warming huts available.



Nutritious, local, and delicious; fresh fish are the best for a fish fry!

Photo courtesy of Tom Rogers, VTFW

"Ice fishing is one of the most accessible forms of fishing and can be a great way to introduce kids to how much fun fishing can be," said Jud Kratzer, fisheries biologist for the Fish & Wildlife Department.

"This festival will demonstrate that ice fishing isn't just about catching fish," said Kratzer. "It's also a great way to spend some time outdoors with kids. You can skate, sled, make a snow fort and have a cookout - all while waiting for the flags on your tip-ups to signal when you've caught a fish."
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FAQ with Nicole

Q: When is the banquet this year?

A: This year, our annual instructor training and recognition banquet will be held on Thursday, May 26, 2016. The banquet will coincide with the 2016 International Hunter Education Association Conference, which is being held in Vergennes at the Basin Harbor Club May 23-26. This international conference will include representatives from all 50 states, Canada and Mexico. This is your chance to mingle with the industry reps such as Kalkomey and Hunter Ed Course, some firearm manufacturers, other instructors from New England (and beyond), and local outfitters. May 26th is geared specifically toward instructors and non-administrators, with a full day of seminars on hunter recruitment, retention, and reactivation, motivational speaking, hands-on teaching methods, and a field day. More information will be sent out to our instructors as it becomes available. For now, check out last year's conference events by visiting IHEA's website at <http://ihea-usa.org/>

Vermont's Free Ice Fishing Day is January 30 Ice Fishing Festival to be Held at Lake Elmore State Park in Celebration

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The Fish & Wildlife Department will lend equipment needed for this fun day on the ice, or participants may bring their own equipment. There will also be prizes and giveaways. For more information, contact Nicole Meier at 802-318-1347 or nicole.meier@vermont.gov. Pre-registration is encouraged but not required, and is available at www.tinyurl.com/IceFishingFest2015. Access is via Beach Road off of Route 12.

Free Ice Fishing Day is held annually on the last Saturday in January. While the day is geared towards people who are new to ice fishing, giving them a chance to give it a try without having to buy a license, any angler may ice fish on any waterbody statewide without a fishing license.



Want to learn expert jigging techniques? Make your own lure? Try out ice fishing before you buy all the necessary equipment? Join us on January 30th on Lake Elmore for a fun day on the ice!

Photo courtesy of Tom Rogers, VTFWD

2016 Hunting, Fishing, Trapping Licenses Available Online Dec. 14

Vermont hunting, fishing and trapping licenses for 2016 will be available on the Fish & Wildlife Department's website (www.vtfishandwildlife.com) on December 14.

"Vermonters really enjoy hunting and fishing," said Vermont Fish & Wildlife Commissioner Louis Porter. "Many people like to purchase their new licenses before January 1 so they will be ready to go ice fishing."

According to a federal survey, Vermonters rank first among residents of the lower 48 states when it comes to participating in fish and wildlife recreation -- with 62 percent of Vermonters going fishing, hunting or wildlife watching, and they led in the New England states in hunting and fishing with 26 percent of residents participating in one or both.

"Our online license sale system makes buying a year-round license as easy as purchasing a movie off Amazon.com and hunting and fishing are way more rewarding, said Porter. "By purchasing a license, you also support conservation statewide."

Porter noted that proceeds from license sales have leveraged federal funding that have provided some of Vermont's greatest wildlife conservation success stories, including restoring common game species such as moose and wild turkey as well as endangered bald eagles, loons and ospreys. These funds also go to managing more than 133,000 acres of conserved land that provide critical habitat for many species as well as recreational opportunities for all Vermonters.

Existing permanent, lifetime or five-year licenses cannot be updated online until January 1.

Printed copies of the "2016 Hunting, Fishing & Trapping Laws and Guide" are also available from license agents. The department's website will soon have a link to an online version.

Hammond Cove Shooting Range Closing for the Winter

The Hammond Cove Shooting Range in Hartland will be closing for the winter on December 15, 2015 and will reopen on April 1, 2016.

This seasonal closure was one of several rule changes enacted earlier this year to improve the facility's operation.

For more information, go to www.vtfishandwildlife.com.

Habitat Management Leads Landowner to Hunting Success

When David Boocock of Montgomery enrolled in a program with the state to improve his land for wildlife, he was hoping the enhancements would boost his odds during the fall deer hunting season. But he never realized that the payoff would come so quickly, or be so impressive.

Three years after he completed a habitat management program with Vermont Fish & Wildlife biologist Dave Adams, Boocock got a 10-point, 181-pound buck on his land. The buck was taken under the same wild apple trees that Boocock and Adams had worked to recover as part of the larger habitat improvement plan for his property.



The 10-point buck David Boocock harvested during the 2015 rifle season.

Photo courtesy of David Boocock.

The deer was the largest Boocock has ever harvested, and he attributes his success directly to the habitat improvements.

“The work they did on my land certainly made a huge difference,” said Boocock. “Not only did I get this nice buck, but there’s another 10-pointer that I’m chasing right now. There were six rack-bucks that were taken within a half mile of my land last year. I don’t believe they’d be there if it wasn’t for these habitat improvements. I’ve seen more partridge since then too.”

Adams says that landowners interested in doing similar habitat management work on their land should contact him about signing up for the Environmental Quality Incentives Program. The program covers a wide range of habitat work, from managing forests for game populations to restoring fields and wetlands for songbirds. It is funded through the U.S.D.A.’s Natural Resources Conservation Service.

“This habitat improvement plan is a success story because not only was Mr. Boocock able to feed his family from the meat, but many other species are also thriving as a result of the habitat improvements he made,” said Adams. “I’d encourage other landowners to get in touch with us to see how we can help you manage your land for wildlife or forestry. We’ll work with you to develop goals and then provide the planning, funding, assistance, and expertise.”

Depending on the goals of the landowner, biologists may suggest cutting sections of forest to promote habitat for game species like grouse, woodcock, and deer. They can develop a plan to improve old forest roads to reduce erosion and water pollution, or create habitat for songbirds such as warblers. Interested landowners can contact Adams directly at dave.adams@vermont.gov or at (802)-324-6529.

“This program is a great chance for landowners to manage their lands for wildlife. We can help you create a legacy of conservation on your property that will live on for generations,” said Adams.

F&W Suggests Waiting to Feed Birds

The Vermont Fish & Wildlife Department is urging people to wait for colder weather and snow before putting up their bird feeders in order to avoid attracting bears.

The department is hearing from people who want to know if they should put out their bird feeders. Normally, December 1 is the recommended start date for feeding birds in Vermont, but this year's lack of snow is keeping some bears from going into their winter dens.

"An abundance of beechnuts and apples coupled with our lack of snow cover this year have resulted in male bears staying active, rather than denning for the winter," said Forrest Hammond, Vermont Fish & Wildlife's bear biologist.

"Female bears normally go into their dens before males," he added. "Males tend to enter their dens in response to most of their foods being unavailable to them rather than to cold temperatures. Without snow covering the ground some males are still foraging for nuts and apples."

"We suggest waiting for six or more inches of snow that lasts before putting out your bird feeders, especially if you have been visited in the past by bears or if there are sightings of bears in your neighborhood," said Hammond. "Due to lack of snow and frozen ground, birds are able to forage in fields and forests for their natural foods."

Surveys have shown that feeding birds and watching wildlife are popular with Vermonters. A 2011 federal survey revealed that people spend more than \$280 million annually to watch wildlife in the state. Feeding birds at home is considered the primary wildlife watching activity.



Vermont Fish & Wildlife says some bears are still active and to wait for six or more inches of snow and colder weather before putting up your bird feeders.

Photo courtesy of Kris & Norm Senna

Muskie Fishing Success Binds Three Generations of Vermonters



Alex Beebe holds up a muskie he caught and released near Swanton, the first muskie caught on a recently stocked section of the Missisquoi River. The catch has excited Vermont's angling community about the potential for this new muskie fishing opportunity. Photo courtesy of Alex Beebe.

When Alex Beebe of Swanton recently reeled in the first muskie caught above Swanton Dam on the Missisquoi River in nearly four decades, he took his place in the fishing lore of Vermont.

In 2013, the Vermont Fish & Wildlife Department began stocking muskellunge, or 'muskie,' along this upper stretch of river with the hopes of continuing to restore this native fish species. Alex's catch is a sign that this conservation effort may be working.

But Alex isn't the first member of his family to achieve greatness with a rod and reel in Vermont. His father, Chris Beebe, is the current record holder for the largest muskie caught in Vermont.

In August 2005, an Addison County angler broke the previous muskie record by one pound, a record that had stood for 27 years. But two weeks later, Chris Beebe's catch shattered that record by more than seven pounds. Chris' muskie record remains unbeaten today, at a massive 38 pounds, 4 ounces. His record fish was more than 52 inches long.

Muskie are closely related to northern pike, with long rows of sharp teeth used to prey on smaller fish. They are renowned for their ability to attain massive sizes, with fish weighing in excess of 60 pounds from some of the more fabled muskie waters in other parts of the U.S. and Canada.

This native Vermont fish disappeared from the Missisquoi River following a chemical spill in the late 1970s. Starting in 2008, the Fish & Wildlife Department began an effort to restore muskie by stocking 44,000 fish to the Missisquoi and by prohibiting harvest by anglers statewide.

Muskie fishing is currently allowed using only artificial flies and lures in Vermont, and any muskie caught must be released immediately rather than harvested.

One of the effort's earliest and most passionate supporters was Chris Beebe's father and Alex's grandfather, Dave Beebe. Dave would regularly show up on the banks of the river to help department staff stock the young muskies. He instilled a love of muskie fishing in his son from a very young age.

"We've been getting out muskie fishing on the Missisquoi since Chris was just a little kid," said Dave. "He'd fall asleep sitting in the boat. We'd have to wake him up when somebody caught a muskie."

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Muskie Fishing Success Binds Three Generations of Vermonters

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Dave Beebe says that some people might not even know that muskie are in Vermont's water bodies, such as the Missisquoi River, Otter Creek, and Lake Champlain. He encourages people to learn how to fish for them, because he says, "It's exciting when you catch a muskie. It's not like bass fishing, where you can catch a whole stringer of fish. It's more like hunting for a big buck."

The muskie Alex Beebe recently caught on this new stretch of the Missisquoi was likely stocked in 2013 as a young, five-inch fish. By the time Alex briefly pulled it from the water this fall, it had grown by nearly two feet to 27 inches, demonstrating the extremely fast growth potential these fish have in appropriate habitat.

Chris Beebe hopes that the current restoration efforts will restore Vermont muskie fishing to its former glory. "When I was 10 years old, the muskie fishing was great," he said. "We'd love to see it return to that again."

Even though he currently holds Vermont's muskie record, Chris Beebe is not resting on his laurels. "There are bigger ones out there and I'm going to keep trying for them," said Chris. "It's a thrill to fish for them and I'm never going to stop. There's lots of great muskie fishing in Vermont's future."



Chris Beebe still holds the Vermont muskie fishing record for this muskie he caught in 2005 on the Missisquoi River.

Photo courtesy of Chris Beebe.

Vermont Fish & Wildlife Calendar and Other Gifts Available

The Vermont Fish & Wildlife Department and Vermont Life Magazine still have some copies of the 2016 Fish & Wildlife Calendar available. This year's calendar maintains the popular large format and includes inset images, matching the format of Vermont Life's other popular calendars.

The new Vermont Fish & Wildlife calendar is filled with spectacular photos of Vermont wildlife and striking scenes of people enjoying the state's vast fish and wildlife resources. The calendar includes hunting, fishing and trapping season dates for each month – the perfect gift for any hunter or angler! These sell out quickly, so get your copy today.

Vermont Fish & Wildlife calendars can be ordered online from Vermont Life's website at www.VermontLifeCatalog.com or by phone at 1-800-455-3399.

Also available is the department's award-winning book, *A Landowner's Guide – Wildlife Habitat Management for Lands in Vermont*. The book is a comprehensive guide to wildlife habitat management on private lands. It is filled with colorful photos and helpful tips.

The guide gives easy-to-follow recommendations on methods for improving habitat for specific species, and for fish and wildlife in general. It includes recommendations for managing for game species such as deer, turkeys, hare, ducks, and grouse, as well as nongame species from songbirds to amphibians.

A Landowner's Guide – Wildlife Habitat Management for Lands in Vermont is available at www.vtfishandwildlife.com for \$12 and makes a great gift for any wildlife enthusiast in your life!

Also available for purchase is the *Guide to Wildlife Management Areas, Fishes of Vermont*, and several other natural resource books.



Vermont Fish & Wildlife Department Calendar 2016
Conserving Fish, Wildlife, Plants and Their Habitats for the People of Vermont

VERMONT FISH & WILDLIFE
vermont life

FEBRUARY 2016

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
	1	2	3	4	5	
6	7	8	9	10	11	12
13	14	15	16	17	18	19
20	21	22	23	24	25	26
27	28	29	30	31		

MAY 2016

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
8	9	10	11	12	13	14
15	16	17	18	19	20	21
22	23	24	25	26	27	28
29	30	31				

AUGUST 2016

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
	1	2	3	4	5	6
7	8	9	10	11	12	13
14	15	16	17	18	19	20
21	22	23	24	25	26	27
28	29	30	31			

The 2016 Fish & Wildlife Calendar is available for purchase now online, at a regional office, and at the Yankee Classic.
Photo courtesy of VTFWD

Vermont Birders Encouraged to Join Annual Christmas Bird Count

This holiday season marks the 116th annual Christmas Bird Count, a favorite tradition among Vermont's birding community. Birders in Vermont are encouraged to participate in the count, which begins on December 14 and runs through January 5.

Even novice birdwatchers can participate because every event is led by an experienced birder. Organizers and participants include birders and biologists from Audubon Vermont, the North Branch Nature Center, the Northwoods Stewardship Center, and the Vermont Fish & Wildlife Department.

"The Christmas Bird Count is a great way to join with friends and family to be part of an historic national bird monitoring project that helps provide a snapshot of where birds are wintering from year to year," said John Buck, wildlife biologist for Vermont Fish & Wildlife. "Participating in the count can be especially rewarding during years when there are irruptions, or mass migrations of an unusual species to Vermont, such as redpolls or snowy owls."

In Vermont, more than a dozen count areas and dates are available where birders gather together to conduct the Christmas Bird Count. The dates and contact information for each event are listed on the Vermont eBird website at www.tinyurl.com/XmasBirdVt15.

"The Christmas Bird Count is one of the longest-running citizen science projects in the country and possibly in the world," said Mark LaBarr, conservation program manager for Audubon Vermont. "Not only does it provide important data for scientists, but it's also a great time for folks who participate."

The Christmas Bird Count originated in 1900 with ornithologist Frank Chapman, an officer in the Audubon Society, who updated what had been a traditional Christmas morning bird hunt to include a census of the wintering locations of various bird species. The count started with just 27 observers and has grown into one of the largest birding events in the world, with tens of thousands of people participating every year.

"This is an enjoyable way to spend a winter day and it's also a great opportunity to see different birds and learn more about them," said Buck. "I'd encourage all Vermonters who are looking for a fun way to see wildlife and participate in citizen science this holiday season to grab their binoculars and join in on this year's annual Christmas Bird Count."



Vermonters with an interest in bird-watching, from avid birders to newbies, are invited to take part in the annual Christmas Bird Count, which is happening in Vermont from December 14 to January 5.

Photo courtesy of VTFWD

Comprehensive New Book on Vermont's Plants Released

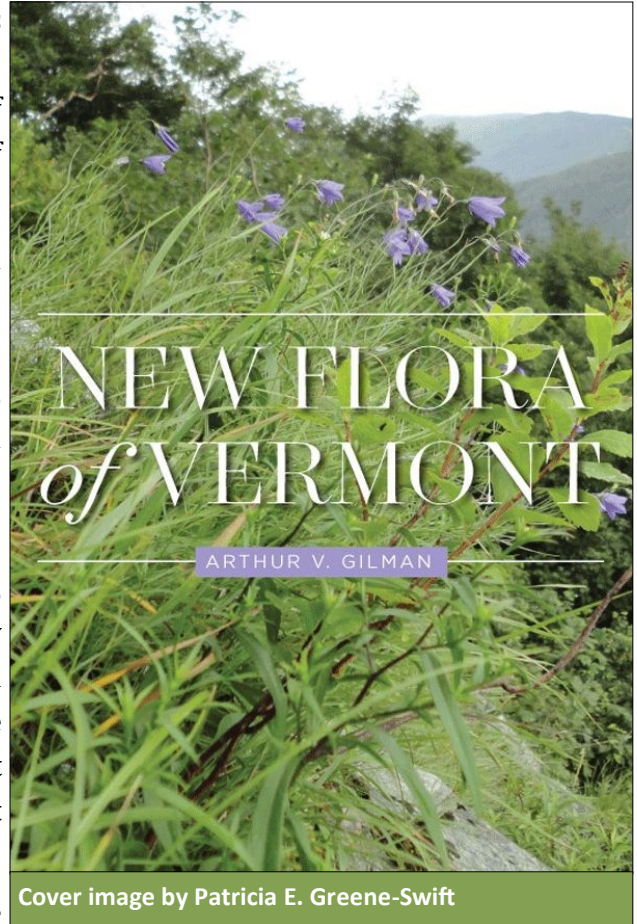
A comprehensive new manual of Vermont's plants has been released by the New York Botanical Garden Press. The first reference of its kind since 1969, *New Flora of Vermont* was written by botanist Arthur Gilman of Marshfield, Vermont.

Fish & Wildlife Department staff collaborated with Gilman on the creation of the book and provided the author access to the state's Natural Heritage Inventory's information on rare, threatened, and endangered plants. The Department also shared plant specimens with Gilman.

New Flora of Vermont serves as a comprehensive treatment of all species known to occur in the state, both native and naturalized. It incorporates the many changes in plant names and species additions and deletions that have occurred in the forty-six years since the last edition of *Flora of Vermont* was published. It also offers identification characteristics, habitat descriptions, locations, and degree of rarity.

"Arthur Gilman is a gifted botanist with a keen eye for detail who worked tirelessly on this project for many years," said Bob Popp, Fish & Wildlife's botanist. "Amateur botanists and specialists alike will appreciate this welcome addition to the state's natural history library. It adds significantly to our knowledge of the plants of Vermont."

New Flora of Vermont is available from the New York Botanical Garden at www.nybgpress.org or can be ordered from local book stores.



Cover image by Patricia E. Greene-Swift

Contact Us!

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Sound Off!

This is YOUR newsletter! Have a photo or story you'd like to share? Is there something that's missing in the newsletter? E-mail Nicole.Meier@vermont.gov with your suggestions, stories, pictures or other input!.

Check Us Out:

Hunter Ed: <https://www.facebook.com/vthuntereducation>

Fish & Wildlife: <https://www.facebook.com/vtfishandwildlife>

<https://twitter.com/VTFishWildlife>