

Vermont Outdoor Education News

Summer 2011



The MISSION of the Vermont Fish & Wildlife Department is the conservation of fish, wildlife, and plants & their habitats for the people of Vermont. In order to accomplish this mission, the integrity, diversity, and vitality of all natural systems must be protected.

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Vermont's Wildlife Belongs to All of Us



No issue is more fundamental to wildlife management than the concept of public trust. It's the privilege that allows all of us to enjoy Vermont's wild places and wild things for hunting, fishing, and other recreational use, and serves as the underpinning of the department's responsibility to manage these resources for all Vermonters.

First embodied in Roman law, public trust maintains that wildlife is held 'in trust' for all people, not just those who can afford it or have enough land to harbor game. Last year, however, a law was passed in Vermont that, in effect, granted ownership of public wildlife to a private landowner. The transfer of more than a hundred deer and a dozen moose in an enclosed fee-for-hunting facility might seem inconsequential in a state with abundant wildlife populations, but the implications are significant.

Creating an exception for one person to exploit wild animals for personal benefit creates a bad precedent. Never before in Vermont history had public wildlife been transferred to private hands, and even beyond our borders, the move has been

widely viewed as one of the most serious attacks on public trust in the United States. Fortunately, the Legislature is moving to affirm that wildlife is, indeed, a public trust resource.

Case law and legislation, however, are abstract. Enjoyment of wildlife is about people. And for people to enjoy the pursuits of hunting and angling, two ingredients are essential: both publicly-owned wildlife, and the mentorship provided by certified hunter education and Let's Go Fishing instructors. As instructors, you are passing on the great tradition of safe, responsible hunting and fishing to the next generation.

I am a lifelong hunter and angler whose passion for the outdoors is now being passed on to my young boys. One day soon, I will entrust them to the dedicated instructors who teach Vermont youth to carry on our strong cultural heritage. I am humbled by your service, and grateful for your invaluable dedication to Vermont's future generations. It is both the commitment of hunting and fishing instructors, and the status of our wildlife as public resources, that are critical to the future of our hunting and fishing traditions.

The Fish & Wildlife Department is working with sporting groups, conservationists, and politicians from across the ideological spectrum to roll back this wildlife giveaway. Ensuring there is a heritage to pass on is the very least we can do for you in return for your dedication.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Patrick H. Berry".

Patrick H. Berry
Commissioner

Let's Go Fishing Program Update

Trish Pelkey, Let's Go Fishing Program Coordinator

The Let's Go Fishing (LGF) program held 37 clinics and was offered in eleven schools, several recreation departments, libraries, and after school programs. LGF was also involved in the Becoming an Outdoor Woman (BOW) and Becoming an Outdoor Family (BOF) programs, as well as the Herrick's Cove and Dead Creek wildlife festivals.

The Let's Go Fishing program was invited back for the Annual LCI Angler Day at the Ballpark in Essex Junction. Vermont children and adults were able to stop at the Let's Go Fishing booth and learn some knot tying skills, how to bait a worm on a hook, become familiar with the Law Digest and its many uses, and put together a habitat for fish.

Volunteers are needed to expand the Let's Go Fishing Program to all areas of the state. There are approximately 230 certified instructors throughout Vermont, but we need more! There are two kinds of volunteers needed: certified instructors and instructor assistants. Certified instructors must go through a daylong training program to learn all of the basics of holding a Let's Go Fishing event. Most certified instructors are affiliated with a club, group, or school that hosts the clinic. If you prefer not to host your own clinic, but would like to assist an instructor, we need your help too. As an instructor assistant,



you help organize the event and teach parts of the clinic based on your particular skills.

The LGF Program is also interested in teachers who want to use the program in their classrooms. The LGF program now offers its curriculum with Vermont Department of Education's Grade Expectations in mind. It has been used in math, physical education, science, and reading classes. Special training is available to guide teachers through the curriculum if they have any questions.

It is easy to become a volunteer. If you are over 18 and would like to share your love of fishing with the next generation of anglers you can call the LGF office at 802-747-7900 or email trish@gwriters.com. ■

Fishing is More Than Catching Fish

Joel Flewelling, Fish and Wildlife Specialist

When you plan a fishing trip with kids, it's important to remember why you are going because it's not always about the fish.

I've had many opportunities to teach kids about fishing since I became a Let's Go Fishing instructor, but some of the most fun was had when we were not actually fishing. Fortunately, the program's activities allow instructors to tailor their workshops to fit the class. I have taught special needs classes where learning how to cast was a great accomplishment. Other classes though, such as those at Lake St. Catherine State Park, have included some real, die hard



Photo Credit: Shawn Good

young anglers who already knew all the basics and then some, but I still managed to teach them something new, either a new knot or how to make their own lures.

When you do go out fishing remember to keep it fun. On a trout fishing trip with my father and nephew, half the fun was hiking back to the beaver pond. Once we got to the pond, my nephew quickly lost interest in fishing, but we brought along some of his action figures to play with while waiting for a bite. What would have been a boring trip for him turned into an adventure, with a couple nice trout as a bonus.

Recently I went ice fishing with a group and had a friend bring his son to join us for the afternoon. Even though it was cold, the sun was shining and there was no wind. We managed to show him how to jig up some perch, but he had more fun riding the snowmobile, playing with the dog and eating hot dogs cooked right out on the ice. The trip could have been a disaster if they had just sat and waited for a flag, but with so many activities going on, he kept busy and had a great time.

So remember, when you are planning a fishing trip or a Let's Go Fishing class, make sure it is fun for the kids. Your idea of a great fishing trip is probably not the same as theirs. ■

2010 Let's Go Fishing Instructor Training

The 2010 Instructor Training workshop was held at the Edward F. Kehoe Education Center in Castleton, VT with 23 participants attending.

Co-directors Trish Pelkey and Jan McCoy started the day reviewing the instructor handbook before breaking into groups and picking activities that covered the four themes of a Let's Go Fishing clinic: Fishing Skills; Tackle Craft; Ecology and Water Resource Management; and Ethics. Participants were asked to demonstrate a skill from each of the themes and answer questions from the group. This is a great way to learn what it would feel like to present in front of students.

Warden Jeff Whipple came to talk about the responsibilities of a warden and to answer questions. After a great lunch we finished up with the presentations, went over the forms that are required for a Let's Go Fishing clinic, and discussed strategies for a successful workshop.

We would like to thank Fish & Wildlife Specialist Joel Flewelling, Hunter Education Specialist Ann Shangraw, and Kehoe Facilities Coordinator Jason Morin for their help during the day. We would also like to thank certified instructor Karl Hubbard for his demonstration on a pond ecosystem and how it can be used in a LGF clinic.

If you, or anyone you know, is interested in becoming a Let's Go Fishing Instructor please contact Trish (802-747-7900) or (trish@gwriters.com). ■

Taking the Lead on Lead

Chris Saunders, Hunter Education Coordinator

A pound of lead can indeed be heavier than a pound of feathers.

Lead is naturally-occurring, non-essential element with a well-documented impact on human and wildlife health. Soft, malleable and exceptionally useful, it's also a hazardous waste and must be managed as such. This can become expensive, and when combined with the potential health risks, the true cost of using lead exceeds the cost of the alternatives. It should be no surprise that the Hunter Education Program is taking steps to reduce its dependence on lead ammunition.

"Old timers who grew up with lead in everything tend to treat the recent interest in lead skeptically," said Mark Scott, Director of Wildlife. "But it's important to note that when an impact is demonstrated, as was the case with spent lead pellet ingestion by waterfowl, state and federal agencies took direct action, and appropriately so, to ban the use of lead shot in waterfowl hunting."

Very little evidence exists to suggest shooting and hunting with lead ammunition impacts hunter or the public health, with the exception of poorly ventilated indoor ranges. However, there's no question that spent lead ammunition is a source of lead in the environment and, as such, a potential risk to both humans and wildlife that must be managed. The form of lead used in ammunition is not easily absorbed through the skin, thus this risk comes mostly through direct ingestion or inhalation.

In humans, lead may cause a range of health effects, from behavioral problems to seizures and even death, and, as a result, the use of lead is now restricted in a number of products, most notably in paint and gasoline. Children, especially six years old and under, are most at risk.

Lead ammunition's impact to wildlife populations is clearer. A number of studies, some dating back to the late 1800s, link high concentrations of spent shot in heavily hunted areas (i.e., marshes, managed dove fields) to lead-poisoned wildlife. Birds seem most at risk, and new evidence also suggests endangered California condor

populations and other birds of prey are being hurt by scavenging hunter-killed game. This information has guided a number of state and federal regulations over the years, most notably the non-toxic shot requirement for waterfowl that took effect through the 1980s and 1990s. This move, which originally met with considerable opposition, has since saved millions of

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Photo Credit: D.A. Saunders

Outdoor Education in the

Learning from Tragedy

By **JAMIE SMITH**

ESSEX—I remember the headlines in the fall of 2008 about the untimely death of a retired English professor in Essex from a tragic backyard shooting range accident. Not long after, I received a call from the Essex police, inquiring about the class I had recently taught in Essex. My heart sank. As facts unfolded, it became clear I was living a hunter education instructor's worst nightmare. Someone I taught was responsible for a fatality. Emotionally gutted, the following weeks brought questions of my worth as a teacher, my methods, the care I imparted to my students, and a feeling of broken trust with the public safety and hunting community I had vowed to protect as a teacher.

I visited the site of the class with the investigating officer, walking him through each element of the class simulated hunt. I explained how the basic principles involved in the case were covered in this activity. I continued to ask myself: "What did I do wrong?" "Have I failed as a teacher?" "Do I ever want to teach again?" "If so, what would I do differently next time?"

Then the State Attorney's office contacted me, requesting records from the class. With the prompt help of department staff, I collected information. The next step was a review of my experience, class materials, and teaching methods in two interviews with members of the State Attorney's office. I explained the simulated hunt, and the materials in the hunter education manual that covered pertinent aspects of the case. The police and attorneys were

incredibly professional and never implied anything regarding my teaching, but I internalized a lot of guilt, at times feeling like I was the one on trial. As the case evolved, I thought of my history and tried to gain perspective.

Over the course of thirteen years as an instructor, I've introduced 5,000 students to hunting. Through hunting, these people have gained deep connections to their world. I taught students to feed themselves, friends, and family. I opened a door for them to study and understand the patterns and

"Was one of my students involved in this?"

interactions of nature in a very intimate way, culminating in the opportunity to make it a part of their body as nourishment. Hunting has allowed all these people to strengthen the familial, friendship, and community bonds. In this reflection, I was also reminded that my most cherished experiences with my father have also been afield.

I tried to equate hunting to other activities with risk. How do driver education teachers continue teaching when one of their students is involved in a fatality? Do they stop teaching or does this motivate them to be even better at what they do?

Reaching out to my fellow instructors helped. At first, they were shocked, hearing the process I was going through. I vented. They listened and

supported. This support was essential to my coping process, it eased my journey at a time that felt lonely and dark. Without them I don't know if I ever would have taught again. My peers helped me realize that as horrible as this experience was, I had to learn from it, grow, and continue teaching.

By the time the trial process arrived, I had reached a new level of certainty. I knew the course material, and had imparted it to the best of my abilities. Upon completion of the class, the people I taught had to use this knowledge and make good decisions with it. Sadly, some did not.

The trial consisted of two phases. The first was a Grand Jury hearing that presented the facts of the case to establish if there was enough evidence for a trial. I was on the stand for about a half an hour, answering questions about my background as an instructor, the materials, and methods involved in that specific course. The trial itself was a few months later, and involved similar questions from the attorneys. I had prepared myself for a difficult cross-examination from the defense, but it was not as grueling as I imagined. Finally, the jury submitted questions, read by the judge. I will remember the last of these questions forever: "Did the Defendant need to take a Hunter Education course to own a gun and set up a backyard range?" The answer was simple but stunning. "No." This question and answer brought some sense of resolution for me.

I know now that I was not the one who pulled the trigger, but sometimes

Two Year Check-up

No, we're not doctors but we can put you back on a course for a healthy instructor life!

Two-year program letters were recently sent out to certified instructors who were marked inactive during the last two years. This process is defined in the Instructor Standard Operating Procedures and Policies, and although our soon-to-be-released updated policies will add a few additional requirements, instructors are currently asked to complete just one of the following tasks to remain active in our database: lead and/or assist with at least one class, attend the Annual Instructor Recognition and Awards Program, or attend a department sponsored training event.

Most instructors who receive a two-year letter have actually been active. However, more often than not, course paperwork had not been submitted. This is problematic for a number of reasons. First and most importantly, all successful students need to be entered into the database

so the State Game Wardens have access to their information. Missing information also hurts students when they lose their cards and when license agents call for confirmation of passing a class. In addition, missing volunteer activity sheets impact the hunter education budget because your time is the program's matching funds for Federal Aid. In short, to avoid any miscommunication or worse, please put extra effort into closing classes by submitting student registration sheets, class rosters and ALL volunteer activity sheets no later than two weeks after class completion.

While the two-year checkup is necessary, we understand that life sometimes gets in the way of volunteer hours. If you receive a two-year notification but wish to remain certified, just give us a call and we can discuss the matter. Always remember that all of us here in Hunter Education greatly appreciate the time and effort you all dedicate to the program statewide – thanks for all you do! ■

Planning Ahead in 2011

A special thank you to everyone involved in conducting classes last year. Fiscal year 2010 resulted in 231 classes, a program record.

Knowing that everyone's time, especially the time you volunteer, is very precious, we are requesting assistance with class planning for the upcoming year. What we are asking is painless: dates and locations for any classes you know you'll be instructing in 2011, even if some of the details aren't finalized. If we can get our class listings online early, it can help you, your students and the program.

First, it saves you and your fellow instructors from competing against each other. It isn't uncommon to have multiple class notifications from instructors within a short radius, each holding a class within the same time period. This occasionally results in classes being cancelled due to low enrollment. Second, everyone (regardless of age) is short on time and being pulled in many directions. Having the ability to plan ahead helps future hunters, especially school-aged children, to choose hunting over other interests or commitments. Let's make sure we
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it still feels like I could have done more. I try not to blame myself, but it is difficult since I am deeply sorrowed by the loss of this man's life, and I grieve for his family. In this process, I came to several personal realizations: hunting is something that is deeply connected to our wild lands, and should be practiced there. Those who want to engage in this time-honored tradition should be willing to travel to an appropriate setting for the education of and participation in hunting.

It is my personal choice from here forward to only teach basic hunter education classes with live-fire of a rifle or shotgun on a proper range. I do look forward to teaching bowhunter education in areas with denser populations and adequate facilities, as I believe the bow and arrow, when used properly, is an appropriate, safe, and effective tool for sub- and urban deer management.

To my fellow instructors with students involved in shootings, students who broke a law, or violated the hunter's code of ethics: You are not alone. If you are grappling with these issues, reach out to your fellow instructors. We are here to support you. Whether you continue teaching is your choice, but know that as a teacher you cannot control the actions of others. You can only teach to the best of your ability, show your students the right path, and hope they walk it. ■

Failing a student. Right or wrong?

John Pellegrini, Hunter Training Coordinator

Dozens of instructors have been asking how they should fail a student.

Of the program's 350 instructors, I can almost guarantee there are 350 different opinions on this subject. However, there are right ways to fail a student and wrong ways, so it's not something to be treated lightly. For instance, I recently learned of several instructors who fail students for making a single mistake in firearm handling and dismiss them on the spot. This is unacceptable. Other instructors, however, are more forgiving, and are willing to spend additional time, even after class, in order to give the student an opportunity to pass. This is ideal.

Here are our recommendations:

- **Be consistent.** Treat your students fairly, showing no preferences to locals or family, and giving everyone the same opportunity to succeed. Remember, a student who fails a class generally will register for another course which means word travels fast in the hunter education world.
- **Consider the student's self esteem.** Wait until a parent or guardian is present before telling the student of his/her failure. Invite that student to take YOUR next class.



Photo Credit: Kyle Scanlon

Stress the positive things the student did. Tell the student what he/she can work on in order for them to successfully prepare for another class. Last October, I certified twelve students who had previously failed other classes. However, their instructors had all taken the time to explain what they needed to work on. As a result, all passed with flying colors, and I would hunt with any of them.

- **Timing is everything.** Only dismiss a student during class if they are being repeatedly disruptive or dangerous. If you are forced to do this, be sure he/she has a ride or a way to get home.
- **Go the extra mile.** If you have a borderline student, work with them if you think that the student can achieve proficiency. This may be the first time a student has worked with a compass or handled a firearm. Be sensitive to this. A lesson learned by extra effort will most likely be remembered by the student forever.
- **Be aware of special needs.** Many of our students have learning disabilities and are receiving assistance at school. While it's their responsibility to inform you of any issues, the reality is pride or embarrassment often get in the way. So be observant and watch for these problems. At the end of your course, ask yourself if you have done all you can to reasonably accommodate the students. My experience has taught me that many students who struggle in school excel in the outdoors.
- **Offer assistance with the written test.** In my course introduction, I inform the class that a written test will be given at the conclusion of the course. I also explain that a certified instructor will read the test to those who want help and that the test can be read to them individually (be sure to have additional help). You need to make sure that every student understands each question. If a student misses the benchmark for passing, spend a minute to go over the questions that he/she missed. If the student knows the answers, but did not understand the questions, take this in consideration with their proficiency in the field. ■

Planning Ahead in 2011

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do everything we can to encourage newcomers to the sport; it's important to the future of hunting and trapping in Vermont. And finally, if we can pull together and outline upcoming and available classes for the year it will enable the program to identify areas in need of additional classes.

Taking these thoughts into consideration, we look forward to hearing from you. As always, it's been our pleasure working with you and we're all looking forward to a great 2011. ■



Photo Credit: Jason Morin

Taking the Lead on Lead *continued from page 3*

duck, geese and swans. Given the increased scrutiny lead poisoning in wildlife is now receiving, more effects will likely be discovered.

PROGRAM STATEMENT

The Vermont Hunter Education Program certifies approximately 5,000 students a year in hunter education courses, the majority of whom are young adolescents. Because of the potential impacts of lead exposure on children and to wildlife, the program has voluntarily reduced its use of lead ammunition since 2004. Of secondary consideration is the cost of lead recycling and reclamation for shooting ranges. Though lead management is effective and not necessarily expensive, the program's reduced reliance on lead ammunition also reflects a desire to reduce its financial impact on department and partner-owned ranges.

Actions

1. Since 2004, the Vermont Hunter Education Program has used, almost exclusively, steel shotgun ammunition.
2. Lead-free .22 rimfire ammunition has only recently been developed. The program is currently determining if sufficient quantities are available and financially feasible for course use.
3. The program has a small number of .243 rifles. Their use is limited. However, lead-free .243 ammunition is now widely available and will be used starting in 2011.
4. From 2006 to 2007, the program phased out its traditional caplock muzzleloaders and switched almost exclusively to modern, in-line rifles. Lead-free muzzleloader ammunition is available. However, testing in 2008 indicated that the program's firearms were not suitable for these bullets due to loading difficulty. Flintlock rifles are still used for demonstration purposes, but rarely fired.
5. In part because of lead exposure concerns, shotgun shell reloading was discontinued as part of the hunter education curriculum at the department's Green Mountain Conservation Camps.
6. Hygiene techniques known to reduce lead exposure, including washing hands with lukewarm water and not eating or drinking on a shooting range, are *mandated* in program live fire procedures. ■

Steel vs. Lead

- **Steel shot is faster and harder than lead so it holds better patterns and penetrates targets deeper.**
- **Steel is lighter, but studies have shown that shotgun pellets kill by penetration rather than hydrostatic shock. For this reason, steel shot is generally a more effective hunting projectile, regardless of target species.**

Practice is Key

- **Steel's tighter patterning means choosing a more open choke than you would usually use.**
- **Steel's lighter weight means choosing a shot two sizes larger than your standard lead load.**

Waste Not, Want Not

Chris Saunders, Hunter Education Coordinator

Hunters hunt for many reasons but the end result should always be the same: honoring our hunting heritage by maximizing the animal's use.

In Vermont, as in all of North America, a mixture of both law and conscience prevent us from casually killing wildlife. Hunters can legally kill certain wild animals, but only under strict regulations designed to manage wildlife populations and maintain fair chase. In addition, many states and federal laws further dictate that harvested animals must be maximized for food, fur and other products. Indeed, the utilization of harvested wildlife is so fundamental to modern American hunting that it can be hard to imagine that this wasn't always the case.

“At the turn of the last century, the future of wildlife in this country, let alone hunting, was in great doubt,” said Tom Decker, Vermont Fish & Wildlife Department's Chief of Operations. “Much of our seemingly inexhaustible abundance of wildlife had proven, well, exhaustible, and it took great hunter-conservationists like Theodore Roosevelt and George Grinnell to save wildlife and hunting opportunities for future generations.”

This was accomplished by a number of means ranging from the creation of the National Wildlife Refuge system to shutting down much of the commercial trade in wildlife to rallying hunters to become true sportsmen and women, dedicated



Utilizing wildlife... down to the last woodcock thigh.



to fair chase and conservation. The foundation of all these efforts was the concept that wildlife was owned by no one. First embodied by Roman law, the notion held that wildlife was held ‘in trust’ for all Americans, not just those who could afford it. As a result, when Roosevelt and others condemned the wanton waste of wildlife, such as killing birds for a handful of feathers to decorate a hat or slaughtering bison for their tongues and hide alone, their crusade went well beyond simply characterizing these acts as disrespectful to the animal. They were framed as unpatriotic; a vandalism of public property and a threat to our founding, democratic ideals.

The nation's sporting community took heart, and today Roosevelt's principles are inseparable from the definition of any responsible hunter. A responsible hunter kills game for a legitimate reason; food, fur or both. A responsible hunter makes every effort possible to retrieve any game they kill or cripple. A responsible hunter thinks ahead about how to properly field dress the animal and care for the meat or handle the pelt no matter what the conditions. A responsible hunter utilizes all the edible portions of the animal or all useable portions of the pelt. A responsible hunter does all of this, even though in Vermont there are no penalties, in many cases, for not doing so.

“Each fall, Vermont's deer hunters bring home one million pounds of boneless venison to their families and friends,” said Decker. “That's enough to completely fill 2,500 large chest freezers.”

Realized or not, each one of those packages of meat, down to the last bit of stew meat, is a testament to the responsible hunter's commitment to their hunting heritage, and a nod to hunter-conservationists who came before them. ■