

Winter 2010

HUNTER EDUCATION INSTRUCTORS' NEWSLETTER



The men and women who volunteer as hunter education instructors serve as teachers, mentors and coaches. The service they deliver is, quite literally, lifesaving.

Happy New Year!

Hunter Education Goals for 2010

Here's wishing everyone a healthy and happy 2010, and a sincere thank you for everything you did to make 2009 such a success for the Hunter Education Program. Your commitment is a reflection of sportsmen's values and the dedication to natural resources that make hunting and shooting sports the outstanding heritage they are.



Photo by Jim Hoyle

Participating in events such as the Gaston County Piedmont Area Wildlife Stewards (PAWS) Youth Day on July 22, 2009 is a good example of activities to be recorded on your cover sheet. Youth days are some of the most worthwhile and enjoyable events in which we get to participate — And don't forget to thank organizers for their willingness to include hunter education and hunting safety as a part of their event. Positive feedback about including hunting in public events is important and appreciated.

As we look ahead to the coming year, it is a good time to set goals and re-examine priorities. Our goals remain unchanged:

- Reduce the number of hunting and hunting related accidents and fatalities.
- Improve the image of the hunter, promote hunting and support conservation.
- Build awareness of legal and ethical responsibilities of hunters.
- Provide a better understanding of wildlife management, laws and regulations.
- Promote and aid in shooting sports for the general public.

Some important reminders for instructors this year:

Time Worked Be sure to properly fill out your time records and turn in promptly. Please be 100 percent accurate. Include all programs (youth and safety days, too) and preparation time. This recordkeeping is important for grant writing and funding, as well as documentation.

Open to All Remember, North Carolina sets no age restrictions for participating in hunter safety classes. Instructors should be careful not to say or imply otherwise. You can state that courses are designed for a sixth-grade comprehension and students must demonstrate safe firearms handling skills and pass a written test, unassisted.

Tree Stand Safety With more North Carolina hunters injured in accidents involving a tree stand than from any other cause, teaching proper tree stand use remains a top priority. Emphasize how important it is to wear a full-body safety harness but, remember, it isn't a legal requirement for hunters to do so.

Support NASP The National Archery in the Schools Program is being received well across the state. The program is offered through physical education classes for grades 4-12 in public schools and equipment, even in these tough economic times, is affordable for school systems.

2009 Hunter Education Instructors of the Year



Cody Reed is congratulated by Lt. Robert Sharpe on being selected as Volunteer Instructor of the Year for D-5. Since being certified in 2002, Reed has been the D-5 leader for total hours invested in the program. He assists at one or more District Tournaments and the State Tournament - working the archery range. He also travels the state and teaches Beginning Archery. He is a member of the N.C. Bowhunters Association and Guilford Bowhunters Club.



Lanny Cowan accepts the award for Hunter Education Instructor of the Year for D-1 by Capt. Jay Rivenbark, Sgt. Brad Stoop and Officer Tim Wadsworth. Working in Hertford County with 15-plus years of volunteer service, he was, until recently, a one-man team. He is a member of the Roanoke Chowan Wildlife Club and heads up many of their youth events. Lanny runs a sporting goods store at Harrell's Hardware in Ahoskie and helps youth hunter safety skills teams with supplies.



Chad Ray receives congratulations from Hunter Education Specialist Wes Blair upon becoming the D-8 Hunter Education Instructor of the Year. Ray is a Cooperative Extension agent in Marion and also works as a 4-H and youth development coordinator in McDowell County. Ray has incorporated the Hunter Education Program into the youth and 4-H programs, and also developed a youth hunter safety skills team.



Larry Walker is Volunteer Instructor of the Year for D-9. The Polk County resident was certified in February 2004 and gives over 240 hours of class time a year, teaching Hunter Education at the middle and high schools. He started and coaches the high school youth hunter safety skills team and is an avid hunter and community volunteer.



Michelle Steeley is congratulated by Hunter Education Specialist Randy Thomas as D-6 Hunter Education Instructor of the Year. Steeley is an active instructor in the community and in the District and State Youth Hunter Safety Skills Tournaments. She and her husband have been involved in the national YHEC competition for the past several years, traveling by car to both Pennsylvania and New Mexico on their own, assisting all North Carolina teams with logistics.



Hunter Education Specialist Kevin Crabtree congratulates Carl Clark as the D-4 Hunter Education Instructor of the Year. Clark has been a volunteer instructor for 16 years and teaches in Scotland County. He has an outstanding relationship with the local wildlife officer and the wildlife enforcement staff. He consistently speaks of his main reason for being involved is for the youth. Clark understands the importance of involving the next generation in hunting.



Danny Lawrence is the D-7 Volunteer Instructor of the Year. Lawrence, of West Jefferson, has been an instructor since August 2001. He obtained his muzzle-loader certification in September 2003. He works efficiently with wildlife enforcement personnel in Ashe County to schedule and complete courses. Lawrence is also active in the Ashe County Wildlife Club, which supports ethical and safe hunting, and shooting competitions.



William Gerald Thornton of Raleigh is the D-3 Hunter Education Instructor of the Year. Thornton oversees Hunter Education for the Wake County Wildlife Club, where he has logged more than 600 hours over the past three years. He manages a program involving numerous instructors with many years of varied experiences to share.



From left, James Clark, Bebe Atkinson, William Brixon, William Waggoner, Ron Morgan, Kim Tavasso and David Ward, representatives from the Pitt County Wildlife Club, accept the D-2 Hunter Education Instructor of the Year recognition from Hunter Education Specialist Stacy Kempf on behalf of their organization. The Pitt County Wildlife Club has gone above and beyond to make the Hunter Education Program successful. They teach numerous basic and advanced courses, host and volunteer at the District Tournament, and, overall, promote a positive image of hunting and hunters.



On Target with the State Hunter Education Coordinator

North Carolina Operation Lifesaver, the nonprofit railroad safety group, has a new media campaign to remind people of the dangers posed by trespassing on train tracks. One aspect of the campaign is aimed directly at hunters, with the message of “There’s a fine line between getting that big kill – And being that big kill. Tracks are for trains, not for hunters.”

A 30-second public service announcement, billboards and other materials are being presented across the state. North Carolina is among the Top 10 states in pedestrian-train incidents and they want anyone who might be tempted to use tracks as easy access for hunting to think twice and not do it. For instructors, it is a reminder to discuss trespass issues with students and how trespass and safety issues go hand-in-hand.



Capt. Chris Huebner



Thanks to a donation from the Ecology Wildlife Federation and with additional assistance from Promatic, manufacturer of clay target throwers, the Hunter Education Program gained equipment and training. Each district now has a target thrower.

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Youth Day on March 5 in Raleigh

The Wildlife Conservation Through Education Committee, a coalition of North Carolina conservation partners, will offer two events for youth 11 to 18 years old on March 5 at the State Fairgrounds in Raleigh.

Take a Walk on the Wild Side requires pre-registration, begins in the morning and is aimed at delivering an objective, science-based foundation with an application to real-world issues that affect students’ community – whether rural, suburban or urban.

Dixie Deer Classic’s Outdoor Lore happens later in the day and pre-registration is not required. Topics include the role of the hunters and non-hunters in conservation, retriever training, red wolves and coyotes, squirrel hunting and wildlife photography.

For more information, call (919) 552-9449 (evenings) or www.wildlifeyouthday.com



In Nash County, the West Mount Ruritan Club made a generous donation to the Hunter Education Program. The civic group also hosts courses throughout the year at their clubhouse near Rocky Mount.

Are Hunter Education Course Tests Too Hard?

This question comes from students, parents and, sometimes, instructors, “Is the written test for the state’s hunter education course too difficult?”

North Carolina sets no minimum age for taking a hunter education course. The courses are based on a sixth-grade learning level and students must pass the written exam unassisted. Adults are advised to be aware of these requirements before registering young children for hunter safety courses.

Questions posed on the test are taken from a pool of questions used by at least 30 other states’ hunter education programs and meet strict standards and guidelines. The questions were devised by learning experts.

Currently, the pass/fail ratio for hunter education course tests is at an expected level of achievement for the enrolled demographic. Scores are on the bell curve where education experts tell us they should be for this type of exam and the average hunter education student.

Too many failing scores would reflect a hard test or a test that isn’t matched to the curriculum, or suited for the average student, and that is not the case in North Carolina. Most who take a hunter education course pay attention, ask questions when needed, and understand the material. And most who take the test pass it.

Those who do not pass typically lack the degree of comprehension needed, either because of age or lack of attention. Do not equate someone’s inability to pass the test with failure on your part or blame the test. With encouragement, many who fail the first time will pass at a later attempt. Success must be earned.

The purpose of the test is for hunter education students to show a sound understanding of conservation, wildlife and safe hunting, so that they will put this knowledge into practice for years to come.

So, is the test too difficult? For something as important as hunting, hunter safety and conservation – we don’t think so.

More Home From The Hunt Campaign

The Home from the Hunt safety campaign continues, with two public service announcements taped in November for broadcast on TV stations, YouTube and on DVD. Both PSAs focus on proper steps for tree stand safety. The two 30-second spots complement a poster that has been mass distributed across the state, showing a daughter running to greet her father who obviously practiced tree stand safety and is home from the hunt. Let us know your ideas.



Scenes from the Advanced Hunter Education Workshop



Hunter Education Field of Dreams

By Bill Stancil

It's wintertime now and the Hunter Education courses have wound down, at least in my neck of the woods. Now is the perfect time to look back and see what we've done right and what we've done wrong... ha-ha...as if any of us could do wrong. Maybe we need to ask ourselves questions like: What was our success rate? Do we need to change the way we teach? Do we need changes in the content? Do we need more concentration on the way we do things now?

When some of us began to hunt, there were no required Hunter Education/Safety courses. Back then – and I'm not saying how long ago – someone took a shotgun from the wall or from behind a door (and the firearm was already loaded), whistled a raw-boned squirrel dog, a bird dog from the barn, or let a pack of beagles out of the dog pen, loaded up, and headed for the fields and woods. You did not know or care about things like ethics or limits, and may never have fired a gun.

The only safety instruction given was “Don't drop the gun; don't look down the barrel and be careful not to shoot me, the dog or yourself” – in that order. And if you got your first shot and the recoil knocked you down or knocked out a tooth and left your forearm and shoulder bruised, it didn't hurt at all if there was a rabbit, squirrel or quail on the ground when you picked yourself up. The ear-to-ear grin made up for any pain you may have suffered, 'cause now you had “Braggin' Rights” and told everybody who would listen about how wonderful the sport of hunting is, and probably bored some folks with the re-telling of the hunt, time and time again. But, that's part of the joy of hunting – making lasting memories to recall again and again as the years roll on. And when we teach Hunter Education, we are helping to build a box for new hunters to fill with hunting memories along the way.



I can see a little of the me of yesteryear when I look into the eyes of some of those taking the course. They are trusting us to impart hunting and safety wisdom that they assume we have accumulated through study and actual experience. What an awesome responsibility lies upon our shoulders! Think about it. We may hold their very lives or the lives of others in the palms of our hands during those moments in class.

The older ones in class are expecting to pick up knowledge and advice that will make them better and safer hunters. The young ones are looking for information and ideas that will help them enjoy the hunting experiences that we are so excited about. They want to know how it feels to actually be in the “great outdoors,” where the wild things are.

Most older students, those more than 16 years old, probably have had some hunting experience, and may have some bad hunting habits. They need the discipline and patience that the course teaches on things such as ethics, responsibility and choices they will make that can spell the difference between enjoyment and tragedy.

Sometimes there are students who can't or don't understand firing sequences of shells and cartridges, arrow fletching, carrying capacities of habitat, etc. If they fail the test, the best we can do is to encourage them to try again when they reach a more mature age or a better understanding. When they try again and are successful, perhaps somewhere in the future, they will remember that the fires of their hunting desire were first stoked by us.



In the final analysis, the Hunter Education Program is a fallow field and we instructors are farmers, for we are planting those fertile furrows of the mind when we teach. And just as farmers use the off-season to prepare their fields for the future, perhaps the best we can do is to continue to improve the material and our methods, sort of like separating the wheat from the chaff. If the field is prepared carefully, the crop we seek will come.

Bill Stancil is a hunter education instructor, freelance writer and hunting mentor who lives in the Rocky Mount community. He is a former D-3 Hunter Education Instructor of the Year.

About the North Carolina Hunter Education Program – Communication and Outreach

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Hunter Education Program

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