

## HUNTER SAFETY GOES TO SCHOOL... A CLASSROOM CHALLENGE TO THE ANTI CROWD

by

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The anti-hunter, the protectionist, and similar extremist groups must rely on a certain amount of ignorance in order to exist. I do not mean to infer that anti-hunters are stupid. On the contrary, many, perhaps even most, of those who subscribe to the doctrine of the anti-hunter would probably be above average in academic achievements. Unfortunately, academic achievement does not always indicate intelligence, and consequently, the world today has an abundance of "educated fools." Many such people can now be found in the ranks of the anti-hunting groups. Some people who hold very impressive academic credentials are totally ignorant regarding man's relationship to nature. Those who would protect all wildlife from hunters, but leave them to starve on a depleted habitat, certainly lack understanding of the problem. People must be trained to accept the fact that wildlife produces surpluses which must be harvested for the good of the species.

The only way we can ever hope to counterbalance the anti-hunter influence is through education. We can try to educate those who have already joined the ranks of the anti-hunter, but our most important task is to educate our young people, those who will be the congressmen, the governors, the conservation department administrators, the landowners, and the hunters of tomorrow.

Our educational efforts must be more than a single walk down a nature trail, a one-time visit to a classroom by a representative of the conservation department, or four hours of training in the safe handling of firearms. In fact, it is our contention that the necessary educational requirements cannot be fulfilled in four, six, or even eight hours of either formal or semi-formal instruction. Regardless of the hours that are involved, the educational requirements cannot be met when the subject matter is limited to firearm safety alone. If we are to be successful, we must have a very comprehensive program which encompasses firearm safety, sound principles of conservation and game management, and matters related to environmental protection. We must begin the educational process when students are young enough to have an open mind, and yet mature enough to comprehend the importance of the training which they are to receive.

Last fall, we began a program in Georgia which we believe will train young people to be knowledgeable in many areas about which we are all concerned, including, but not limited to, wildlife management, hunting ethics, game identification, habitat improvement, and firearm safety.

Ours is the most comprehensive outdoor education program available in high schools anywhere in the nation today. It requires 160 hours of study...one hour each school day...to complete the course. Students are being offered this course as an elective in high schools throughout Georgia. In this first year, we were able to finance a program large enough to train only 3,000 students. Since this was the first such program in the country, no material existed which could be used as texts; therefore, texts had to be written and printed. Color slides...a total of 18,000...had to be selected, processed, and separated into series of 360 slides for each school. A film library had to be assembled, and finally, and most importantly, teachers had to be trained to teach the course.

Schools interested in such a course were invited to inquire about how they could participate. Applications were accepted from these schools on a "first come, first

served" basis until we reached our limit of 3,000 students. In order to spread the program to as many schools as possible, we allowed each school to enroll a minimum of 25 students with a maximum of 10% of their average daily attendance. The first 45 applications received filled our student limit and today these schools, scattered all across the State, are providing instruction in such areas as: hunting traditions in America...hunter ethics...the hunter's role in conservation...wildlife identification...the "right" to take wildlife...why we have conservation laws...the work of the conservation officer...wildlife management...the place of the gun in a game management program...proper firearm selection...and hunter safety. Some 60 hours of the program are devoted to conservation and hunter safety.

Being a comprehensive program, our's goes well beyond wildlife and hunting. Our program also includes 35 hours of boating safety training, 25 hours of camping skills, 35 hours of fish management and fishing skills, and 25 hours of such things as water and air quality, land management and basic forestry.

Young people enrolled in this program spend between 20 and 25% of their time on field trips where they have the opportunity to demonstrate the skills and knowledge learned during the classroom sessions. While studying wildlife management, students visit one of our game management areas. After completing the classroom portion of the hunter safety work, students are carried to a range where they fire .22 rifles and 20 gauge shotguns, demonstrating their ability to handle firearms safely under loaded conditions. Boating field trips include the use of runabouts equipped with dual controls, similar to driver training automobiles. Camping, fishing, and ecological field trips are also a part of our program.

The program we have developed in Georgia is designed to wipe out some of the greatest sources of ammunition the anti-hunter has to use against us...the slob hunter...the game hog...and the indiscriminate shooter. But our program goes further than this. We will teach young people why we need and have conservation laws. We are convinced that if our citizens understand why conservation laws are necessary and how they come about, they will be much more inclined, not only to obey these laws themselves, but also to report others who do not. Another important result of our program will be citizens who understand and accept the fact that the harvest of surplus wildlife is essential to the well-being of this vast natural resource.

The teachers involved in our program this year were each required to complete 55 hours of special training and were certified to teach by our department. Since certification, several have attended additional workshops provided by the department. These teachers are very enthusiastic about the program and consequently are doing an excellent job. Administrators of the schools...some of whom were only lukewarm to the program at the outset...are already inquiring about the possibility of expanding their program next year. And students...they are having a ball. Oh, we've had some dropouts in the program...those who registered for the course thinking it was going to be all fun and games and then realized there was quite a bit of serious work involved. We feel that we are better off with such students out of the program. We have entirely too many genuinely interested students who cannot get into outdoor education to allow those merely looking for a "crip" course to remain in the program.

I suppose one of the best indications of the success of our program, specifically as it relates to the anti-hunter, can be found in a letter I received from one of the students in South Georgia. He wrote that his parents were opposed to hunting and would not allow him to have a firearm of any kind. After enrolling in outdoor education, he began to carry his textbook home at night and his father picked it up and became interested in it. As a result of the interest generated through the course, this young man has been promised a new shotgun for Christmas, provided he successfully completes his first quarter of outdoor education.

We actually expected that somewhere along the line we would be accused of using this program to promote hunting. So far, this has not come to pass, and actually, nothing could be farther from the truth. We take a great deal of pride in the fact that the Georgia Outdoor Education Program has something to offer to all people...male and female...hunter and non-hunter.

We believe that through this program, we will help future generations of Georgians...whether they hunt or not...understand and appreciate a diversity of human experiences with wildlife.

This is the challenge we send from the classrooms of Georgia to the anti group.

## **HUNTER SAFETY GOES TO SCHOOL (A Classroom Challenge to the Anti Crowd)**

### **Part II**

*by*

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The major thrust of Missouri's Hunter Safety efforts are in the school classrooms of our state. This is not to say that we train exclusively through the school systems.... quite the contrary, we still employ all of the standard approaches that have served the program so well for so many years....4-H Clubs, Boy and Girl Scouts, F.F.A., Conservation Clubs, etc.

We have learned, however, that by working cooperatively with the classroom teacher, our training efforts reach a much broader cross section of Missouri's youth.....not just those interested in hunting. The classroom approach allows us to reach considerably larger numbers of the fairer sex.....a must if the sport of hunting is to survive and the right of private ownership of firearms is to continue. Recent studies have proven that the majority of females of college age are opposed to both hunting and the use of firearms.

The Missouri Department of Education officially recognized hunter safety as an accredited course of study for Missouri schools in 1969....Since that beginning the program has been broadened to include recreational shooting.

In my ensuing remarks when referring to hunter safety you should also think in the general terms of firearms safety and when referring to the shooting sports the term recreational shooting should be considered as synonymous and both terms should be considered to include archery. I point this out because of the nature of our program.

Perhaps the best over-all definition of our program has been supplied by the Missouri State High School Activities Association as a "Sequential instructional and competitive shooting sports program beginning with hunter safety training and skill development in the physical education program and culminating as an inter-scholastic school sponsored activity."

Developed jointly by the Missouri Departments of Conservation and Education, this course is founded on the rationale that.....

"The shooting sports program is a sequential educational process designed to begin with basic hunter safety instruction and culminating in a lifetime of recreational and competitive sports. There are several important fundamental reasons for schools to support this program, beginning with our state and national heritage, the citizens' constitutional rights and the furtherance of ones ability to get along in society with his peers. The development and use of firearms have been synonymous with the expansion and growth of our state and nation.

Shooting is a lifetime sport. It is a sport that should be available to members of either sex and offers a multitude of co-educational possibilities. Competitive shooting lends itself to the development of sportsmanship, teamwork and self-discipline. Age, sex and physical size are not limiting factors for the participants in recreational shooting. The shooting sports can be enjoyed and safety participated in by the handicapped as well as the physically fit. For some participants this shooting sports program could lead to the