

# **JAKES Event—A Cooperative Approach to Conservation Education**

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*Abstract:* Juniors Acquiring Knowledge, Ethics, and Sportsmanship (JAKES) is a National Wild Turkey Federation (NWTf) youth program designed to help pass on the tradition of hunting, teach the principles of turkey population and habitat management, hunting ethics, and safe and responsible hunting principles, and to instill land and resource conservation ethics. The USDA Forest Service often cooperates with the NWTf in co-sponsoring JAKES Events on National Forest lands. The NWTf and Forest Service recognize the number of turkey hunters is growing yearly, and increasing numbers of young people are learning to hunt without the benefits of an older mentor. Since there is no standard format for conducting a JAKES event, organizers can be creative in making the event fun and entertaining for kids. This outdoor conservation program has been well received across the country. The NWTf and Forest Service combine resources to enhance the awareness of natural resource conservation to future hunters and anglers.

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Since the early 1980s sport hunting has gone through one of its most difficult periods. There has been a general trend where an ever smaller percentage of the U.S. population hunts. At the same time, sophisticated and well-funded animal rights, anti-hunting, and anti-gun movements have developed. The result has been a decline in positive media coverage of hunting and shooting activities. Another sad trend is the increase of single parent families, and in most cases, the mother is the head-of-household. The chances of passing on the rich traditions of hunting and wildlife conservation are severely limited in these situations.

The majority of the general public obtains its knowledge of wildlife and conservation issues from watching television. It is no wonder that our younger generation is more protection minded and some think that life for wild creatures do not have to struggle to survive. Attitudes about consumptive and non-

consumptive uses of wildlife seem to be set by the time children reach their teens. Specific, well targeted conservation education programs can be successful in developing and/or changing attitudes to support consumptive use of wildlife and acceptance of hunting. The future health of hunting sports rests on the shoulders of today's youth. As resource managers, hunters, and educators, we must be creative and innovative in our approach to conservation education if we are to retain our rich traditions of hunting and to be successful in passing on these traditions to the next generation as part of their American heritage.

The National Wild Turkey Federation volunteers are the driving force in conducting JAKES events across the United States. Forest Service personnel are involved in the planning and implementation of JAKES events on National Forest lands. The dedication and commitment of these groups is helping to instill knowledge, ethics, and sportsmanship in our younger generation.

## Background

The number of turkey hunters is growing annually, and increasing numbers of young people are learning to hunt without the benefit of an older, experienced mentor. To help address this situation the National Wild Turkey Federation (NWTf) initiated the JAKES youth program in 1981. JAKES is an acronym for Juniors Acquiring Knowledge, Ethics and Sportsmanship. The JAKES youth program was designed to help pass on the traditions of hunting, to teach the principles of turkey population and habitat management, hunting ethics, safe and responsible hunting principles, and to instill land and resource conservation ethics.

The goals of the JAKES Program are to:

- 1) Introduce young people to an outdoor setting
- 2) Introduce young people to the principles of wildlife and forest management
- 3) Provide an opportunity for participants to share in outdoor fellowship with other young people
- 4) Provide training/instruction in the principles of safe and responsible hunting skills.

## Methods

All JAKES events are organized by local chapters of the National Wild Turkey Federation and often include state and federal wildlife and land management agencies as partners. Organizers are urged to involve local businesses, organizations, and residents in support of their event.

The Forest Service plays a cooperative role in hosting JAKES Events on National Forest Lands. These lands are managed to produce wildlife and fish; protect threatened, endangered, and sensitive species; and benefit all types of National Forest users. Because of this mission, National Forest lands provide

an excellent backdrop to demonstrate a variety of natural resource conservation practices. The Forest Service recognizes that conservation education is vital to acceptance of the ecosystem management approach in sustaining the quality of the National Forest's fish, wildlife, and a wide variety of other forest resources.

There is no standard format or "cookbook recipe" for conducting a JAKES event, so organizers are only limited by their imaginations in providing an event that is fun and entertaining for kids. There is one format that has been used successfully in many JAKES events and is available from the NWTF (P.O. Box 530, Edgefield, SC 29824). It is provided simply as a means of showing what can be done at an event. Local organizers can use it or develop their own format. Other items in support of JAKES events are currently being developed and will soon be available through the NWTF.

The components of a typical JAKES event may include include: 1) hunter safety, 2) hunter ethics, 3) safe handling of firearms, 4) turkey management/biology, 5) wildlife habitat enhancement, 6) hunting/calling skills, 7) actual range firing, 8) landowner ethics/sportsmanship, and 9) hands on turkey research (i.e., radio telemetry, firing a rocket net, tools for trap and transfer efforts).

Most NWTF and Forest Service cooperative JAKES events are 1-day events, although there have been events that included an over night stay for youngsters. Learning stations can be established where a variety of different topics are discussed as youngsters move from station to station. If participation is relatively small, instructors can be assigned time slots and present their topics to the whole group.

Successful JAKES events are fun and interesting to the youngsters. There is no substitute for "hand and minds on" activities. The sound of a rocket net going off or to fire a shotgun for the first time will surely make a lasting impression on a youngster. Remember, the key is to give them a little message, a lot of fun, feed them and send them home.

## Results

In 1992, the NWTF and the Forest Service cooperatively put on a training session on "How to Organize and Run a JAKES Event" at the Wild Turkey Center in Edgefield, South Carolina. As part of that training, attendees helped run a JAKES event in cooperation with the Edgefield Chapter of the NWTF and the Edgefield Ranger District of the Sumter National Forest. The format used at that training was developed by Dennis Campbell, who was a volunteer at that time and who now is the NWTF Virginia/West Virginia regional director, and Rod McClanahan, who was the forest biologist on the George Washington National Forest and who now serves in a similar capacity on the National Forests in North Carolina. This format is the one available from the NWTF.

More than 18 states were represented at that dual event, and the message was carried back to hometowns and forests: This is fun! Since then, JAKES

events have been held in states from California to Pennsylvania and from Ohio to Alabama. Some events involved hundreds of kids, others involved only 20, but the size of the event is much less important than the fact that an event is held. It is much better to put on a small event than that to not put one on at all, thinking only large ones are successful.

## **Discussion**

If we are to hold on to the rich tradition of hunting in the United States it will be up to private conservation organizations like the National Wild Turkey Federation, federal and state agencies, and thousands of inspired and talented individuals to make the public aware of the vital, positive role hunters and hunting play in the enhancement of America's wild living resources. Unfortunately we are faced with stiff competition as America's youth are influenced by videos, television, Nintendo, and especially "interactive" games, and shows. The need exists to show youngsters that a walk in the woods is an interactive event, and that hunting and natural resource conservation are more complex than just protection or "pop slogans." Today's youths will be tomorrow's environmental and conservation policy and decision makers. It is imperative to us now, as natural resource managers, conservation organizations, and educators, that we continue to systematically and comprehensively enhance our approach to natural resource conservation education.

By investing in today's youth, the National Wild Turkey Federation and the U.S. Forest Service are cooperatively planting a seed that will ensure that future generations will develop the awareness, knowledge, and commitment that will result in preserving our rich hunting heritage. By instilling a sense of sportsmanship and hunter ethics in today's youth, we hope to reap the benefits of responsible behavior and constructive actions concerning wildlife in the future.